

BY THE AUTHOR OF
"THE MYSTERY OF A HANSOM CAB"



THE
WHITE
PRIOR
BY
FERGUS HUME

LONDON:

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A Family Mystery

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FERGUS HUME

AUTHOR OF

"THE MYSTERY OF A HANSOM CAB," "MONSIEUR JUDAS,

"THE GATES OF DAWN, ETC.

Open no locked doors, lest evil betides,
Steal thou no key, lest it lead to doom;
In every cupboard a skeleton hides,
And every house hath its Bluebeard's room.



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THE WHITE PRIOR

CHAPTER I

THE TUTOR

WITH the impatient egotism of six-and-twenty, Gilbert Tresham assumed that he was hardly treated in being relegated to a country life, shelved as it were, at the fighting age of intellectuality; and, but for the small matter of poverty, he would have remained by preference in London. A novel, a play, a volume of poems, a book of essays, on these rested his hopes of fortune and fame; but as all had been rejected by the publishers, his prudence, inherited from a Scotch mother, inclined him to fall back on his teaching capabilities. He lacked money, friends, and influence; so cautiously resolved to wait, until he had one of the three, at least, to aid his ambition. With characteristic promptitude, he acted on this resolution, and hence found himself in a second-class smoking carriage on his way to a tutorial appointment at Marlow. Foolhardiness is not valour, and Gilbert, who was difficult to please in the matter of literary form and style, acted

wisely in declining Grub Street and its pot-boiling work.

This he knew, and was content to abide by his decision; yet, so hard was the battle of inclination against common-sense, that he could not suppress a sigh, as the train slid out of the bustling station; and later emerged from the canopy of smoke which overhangs London's lights, into the fertile country.

To create characters for stage and novel was more tempting to one of his imaginative temperament than to instruct the intellect of a dull lad; and without looking forward with absolute repugnance to his task, Gilbert had but little relish for the employment to which he was condemned for want of money. The most masterful spirit cannot always control the rebellious flesh, and the young man had considerable difficulty in forcing himself to take a calm view of his situation.

He had opportunity to indulge his disgust without restraint, as the compartment was tenanted solely by himself; but in place of wasting time and strength in futile rage, he threw himself on the cushions and, lighting his pipe, abandoned himself to philosophical reflections. With the lucidity of a trained thinker, he reviewed his life so far, from what he remembered of his childish years, to his present position in the twenties. Between that and this had occurred the many events which made him the man he was.

Hitherto, to use a hackneyed image, his life had resembled a placidly flowing river pursuing its course over a smooth bed, through peaceful plains. If he had not known wealth, he had not felt the sting of poverty,

and from nursery to school, from school to college, from college to London, he had had a singularly uneventful career. To recur to the above-mentioned image, no shoals had impeded his course, no rocks had fretted the even flow of his waters, but on and on his days, like the stream, had glided unchecked, unvaried, undisturbed. But now the river of years was rounding a curve, and it was impossible to prognosticate in what tortuous windings it might flow.

Left an orphan at an early age, Tresham had been consigned to the care of a bookish uncle who was the rector of a Devonshire parish. His father, a captain in the army, had perished in one of the frontier wars of the Empire, and had shortly been followed to the other world by his attached wife. Kind friends dispatched the orphan of three years to the care of the Rev. Simon Tresham, his paternal uncle; and henceforth, to the age of seventeen, Gilbert had dwelt on the verge of Exmoor. His relative, a kindly old creature, albeit rather given to dry-as-dust pursuits, had taught the lad excellently well; and when he was entered at Exeter College there were few undergraduates possessed of sounder learning, or a wider range of subjects.

The sombre existence in that quiet rectory had somewhat shadowed the spirit of the lad, and he was grave beyond his years. Though no mean athlete, as was testified by his well-knit frame, he affected the library and class-room rather than the river and cricket-field; being resolved, as he early stated, to devote himself to literature. To this end he studied hard, and left Oxford with a brilliant record and an M.A.

degree. Thence, with the approbation of his uncle, he repaired to London, and in a shabby Bloomsbury lodging sought to amplify his scholastic lore by a knowledge of city life.

Gifted with talent, and scholarship, and indomitable perseverance, he would doubtless have achieved those first difficult steps of Fame's ladder; but that Fortune, as though regretting her former liberality, placed a hindrance in his path. Hardly had he been settled a year in London when his uncle died, and Gilbert hurried down to the Exmoor rectory to find himself a friendless pauper. What small income the Rev. Simon Tresham possessed died with him, and, with the exception of two hundred pounds, the young aspirant to letters was without funds. Nevertheless, such an amount seemed riches to one of his habits, and he re-entered the turmoil of London with every hope that he would be enabled to gain bread by his pen, before his capital vanished.

But as time was the most necessary of all things to complete the magic draught of Mephistopheles, so is time requisite to gain a name and fortune. The first unsteady steps in the literary profession are very slow, and require to be well planted in order to avoid a retrograde movement. A man may have the genius of Shakespere, the perseverance of a factory-begotten millionaire, and yet remain years in London without being able to thrust his head and shoulders above the thronging millions of the city. No doubt to such a one the chance comes, but Gilbert could not afford to wait for the propitious moment. With the strictest

economy he was unable to make his money last for more than eighteen months, and with the utmost perseverance he failed to get a book published, or a play read. Many men would have fought their way onward with the strength of despair, but Tresham was sufficiently wise to see that such penury and hasty work would strangle his small measure of genius. He was not a great man, and at the best possessed only a bright and lively fancy which, polished by culture, might enable him to arrest the ear of the public. To speak honestly, he lacked power, and his literary ramblings were rather produced by artificial incubation than by material inspiration. His small creative germ was amplified and polished and tended until it grew into a bright flowering shrub, pretty enough to look at, but without the enduring qualities or grandeur of the oak. He worked slowly, and polished incessantly, so above all things required time to produce his works in a sufficiently dainty guise to attract attention. Hitherto, despite all efforts, his delicate wares had met with no appreciation, and when his money dwindled down to a score of pounds he found himself compelled either to renounce his ambition of moderate fame, or—sad alternative—to resign himself to the heart-breaking profession of a literary hack.

Then his maternal inheritance of prudence came to his aid, and he resolved to make use of his teaching capacities to gain bread. In the retirement of such a situation, he thought, he would be able to produce and send forth his fragile literary children, and at the same time be enabled to live comfortably and take time over

his work. To this end he inserted an advertisement in several newspapers announcing his qualifications as a tutor, and after many disappointments was engaged by Mr. Vincent Harley of the Priory, Berkshire, to instruct his son and heir in the rudiments of the classics. The wage offered was small but certain, so Gilbert, not without regret, turned his back on literary London and took a second-class ticket for Marlow. From this brief review it will easily be seen that the comparison of his life to a river, smooth flowing and tranquil, is not lacking in point.

Having endowed a hero with but mediocre talents, eked out by indefatigable industry, and a vein of prudence, justice demands that his physical attributes should make amends for his mental deficiencies. But alas! Tresham was no Greek god of supernal beauty, and would be scorned by the frantic lady novelist, who draws her hero with the brain of Plato and the looks of Alcibiades. Again must Tresham sink to the level of the mediocrities, for he was simply a long-limbed, well-looking youth, with a kind face and an attractive manner. There are as many as good as he in England, for, despite the wailings of pessimists, our country produces as fine a crop of honourable stalwart lads as ever it did; and our little wars in savage lands show that English pluck and honour are as noticeable characteristics of our men of to-day as they ever were in the golden times of Elizabeth, and no higher character than this is necessary to any Englishman, much less to modest Gilbert Tresham. Once and for all in Amyas Leigh did Kingsley set forth the noble qualities of our

islanders, and it were folly to add to or to take away aught from that grand type of our race.

It being thus stated that Tresham was a well-educated, athletic, and honourable English lad, there is nothing more to be said in his favour or against him. He lay on his back watching the yellow gaslight looming through clouds of smoke; and having grumbled a while, as is the fashion and privilege of our insular youth, shook himself free of regrets, and addressed himself to take an intelligent interest in his journey through the fertile lands of Berkshire.

It was a wet night, and the driving rain blurred the window-panes so that he could see nothing. Sometimes the lights of a village twinkled through the gloom as the train rattled past, but for the most part there was nothing but fields and hedgerows looming indistinctly on either side. Tresham found no interest in such monotony, and so betook himself to the re-reading of a letter from his friend Barstone, who had been mainly instrumental, along with the advertisement, in procuring him the appointment. The letter, among other things, hinted at the quality of the inmates he might expect to find in the Priory.

"Harley is a quiet old man," said the letter, "rather whimsical and bookish. For weeks he will shut himself up in his library and see no one; then throw open his house, and invite the country-side. He is attended by an old valet called Jasper, with whom you should make friends, as he is all-powerful in the house—a dumb creature he is, savage and morose; and, evidently fearful of losing his influence over Harley, watches him

as a cat does a mouse. He resembles a Turkish mute, misanthropic, silent, and evil. The housekeeper is a lady-like personage, whom I have only seen once, but is very melancholy, and looks like a mediæval abbess of some especially strict convent. And talking about convents, Harley's house, as you can guess by its name 'The Priory,' formerly had something to do with Catholicism. It is said to be haunted by the ghost of a guilty monk—though in what his guilt consists I don't know. At all events, my dear Tresham, he strolls about the grounds at night, and if you are afraid of ghosts don't go near the west wing. Your pupil is a pale-faced, delicate lad, who seems to me to have water on the brain; but you will no doubt find him easy enough to deal with. His sister Fay is—an angel."

From this point the letter resolved itself into a series of ecstatic paragraphs about the said young lady, and Tresham had no difficulty in seeing that his friend Barstone was in love with her. The college career of that young man had been chequered by numerous episodes of a like nature. "And no doubt he will marry the girl," thought he, returning the letter to his pocket. "It will be an excellent match, as Barstone's acres lie contiguous to those of Harley's. I wonder he doesn't warn me against falling in love with Miss Harley. But there's no fear of that, and even if there were, I should curb my passion, as she certainly would not look twice at a poor tutor."

By this time the train had reached Bourne End, and Gilbert transferred himself and his baggage to the Marlow train. The progress of this latter was suffi-

ciently slow, but he amused himself in speculating on the characters of the four people with whom he was to spend the next few years. The idea that the Priory was haunted appealed to the superstitious side of his nature, and he was quite determined on exploring the west wing. "Don't nail his ear to the pump," cried the old woman of the culprit, and it was immediately done. "Don't go near the west wing," wrote Barstone, and Gilbert forthwith determined to pay an early visit to the same.

At Marlow station he found a carriage awaiting him, and he was soon rolling over the bridge towards the Priory. On either side rose houses and hedgerows—these gave place to an avenue of trees—then between massive stone pillars the carriage passed into the grounds of his new home. As it stopped at the porch the door opened and a flood of yellow light poured forth "a good omen," quoth Gilbert, the superstitious "light in darkness."

CHAPTER II

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

AFTER his dreary journey Tresham was by no means sorry to find himself seated before a well-spread table in a comfortable room, and did full justice to the excellent meal provided by the hospitality of Mr. Harley. Owing to the lateness of the hour he hardly expected to see his employer that evening, and had

already turned his thoughts towards the final pipe and subsequent retirement, when an elderly man abruptly entered the room. The new-comer, whom Tresham rightly guessed to be Jasper, was a lean, cadaverous creature, neatly arrayed in black broadcloth. His clean-shaven face was as impassive as that of the Sphinx, and his grey hair was plastered smoothly on his egg-shaped skull. Deferential as he was in manner, Tresham took an unreasoning dislike to his stealthy movements and sinuous obsequiousness; nor was this feeling of repulsion lessened when he remembered that the man was dumb.

Of this latter failing he had immediate proof, for Jasper held in his hands a packet of small cards. Selecting two of these he placed them before Tresham, who read on the first, "Mr. Harley," and on the second, "The library." Rightly interpreting this as a request that he should so seek his host in that room he was about to reply, but reflecting that Jasper was probably deaf as well as dumb, he took out his pencil to communicate by writing. To his surprise Jasper picked up the cards and touched his ears with a nod to intimate that he could hear.

"You are not deaf then?" asked Tresham, in some astonishment.

Jasper shook his head, and hastily produced another card on which was printed "An accident."

"Poor fellow," said Tresham involuntarily; but instead of being pleased by this mark of sympathy, Jasper looked angered, and again thrust before the tutor the card inscribed with his master's name.

"Very well," said the young man, smiling at the odd creature, "I will follow you at once."

Jasper gave a nod of satisfaction and led the way down-stairs. These were of mahogany, dark and dreary in appearance, and but dimly lighted, so that following in the wake of his dumb guide, Tresham became aware of a sudden depression of spirits, as though something evil were in the air. Impulsively he touched Jasper's arm, as they paused at the door of the library.

"Is this place haunted?" he asked anxiously.

The idea had only entered his head at that moment, and was but an idle caprice of the imagination which he hardly expected to be taken seriously.

Jasper stamped furiously, and his face assumed a sinister expression as he showed a card on which was written "Lies! Lies!! Lies!!!" Then producing another inscribed "Silence," he ushered Tresham into the library before he had time to recover from the oddity of this behaviour. The chance remark had so raised the ire of this man that Tresham fancied he must have unconsciously hit the mark.

If the stairs were dimly illuminated amends was made in the library, which was one blaze of light. It seemed to Tresham's bewildered eyes as though a thousand tapers flamed on all sides; but he soon saw that the actual number of these was trebled and quadrupled by skilfully-placed mirrors, which intervened between the well-filled book-shelves. Surrounded by vast sheets of looking-glass on all sides, the room seemed to extend indefinitely, and Tresham felt himself seized with vertigo when a glance upward revealed a

ceiling wholly of mirrors. In the blaze of light, in the multiplicity of reflections, there was something monstrous and fantastical. Duplicated in every direction, he felt as though he were in a world of ghosts.

"Welcome to the Priory, Mr. Tresham," said a voice behind him; "I trust you had a pleasant journey."

"Thank you, yes; very pleasant," stammered Gilbert, turning towards the speaker. "You must excuse me, Mr. Harley, but I feel somewhat dazed. These mirrors!"

"Yes, they are confusing to one not accustomed to them," replied Harley smoothly. "Sit down here, Mr. Tresham, and let us talk. Later on I will introduce your pupil to you."

The owner of the Priory was a slender, refined-looking man, attired in evening dress, with a precision which argued a scrupulous regard for appearance. A little below the middle height, he seemed but a frail creature, bloodless and weak. His narrow feet and delicate hands were almost feminine in size, and the latter especially, with long fingers and carefully-trimmed nails, struck Gilbert as unpleasantly like the claws of a bird. A perfectly white complexion, fair hair, and pale blue eyes completed his etiolated appearance; and the man looked like the last offshoot of an exhausted race, effete and worn out. A languor pervaded looks and movements which assimilated him to some pale flower, secluded from the vivifying influence of sun and wind. In him his race had reached its end, for it seemed impossible that so sapless a twig of the family tree could put forth another shoot. Yet he had a son and

a daughter; and Gilbert shuddered to think what weakness weakness had produced.

"Will you have a glass of wine, Mr. Tresham?" said Harley, pushing forward a decanter of port. "I don't like drinking by myself, yet am obliged to do so owing to the absence of company and to my constitutional weakness; I am not strong, and wine makes blood."

Gilbert silently acquiesced in this remark as he accepted the invitation, and looked curiously at the frail being, lying weak and exhausted in the depths of the arm-chair. A breath would have blown him away, yet despite his physical weakness he was sufficiently spirited, and talked brightly to his visitor.

"I hope you will like the Priory," said he, languidly sipping his wine; "we are a quiet folk here, and I do not think you will have much trouble with Felix."

"Is he backward, Mr. Harley?"

"Not in some things, but in others—very much so. The fact is, the lad is stuffed with fiction and poetry—both bad for a delicate boy. I wish you to induct him into a course of profitable reading. Keep him at Latin and Greek, Mr. Tresham, for he is very backward in the classics. However, I give you full permission to act as you think best," added Harley, with a faint smile, "for Sir Percy Barstone has given me a most brilliant report of your teaching capabilities."

"Sir Percy is most kind, sir. It is true that I helped him to pass his examination, but beyond that I have no experience in teaching."

"Nor has Felix of learning," replied Harley amiably,

"so you are both novices. Do you like this room, Mr. Tresham?"

"Honestly speaking, I can't say that I do. The multiplicity of mirrors, and especially those on the roof, give me a sensation of vertigo."

"Ah, you are not used to them," replied Harley complacently. "I like those innumerable reflections because they make me feel as though many people were present. I hate solitude, and I cannot go into society on account of my wretched health, so I hit on this plan to provide myself with silent company. Sitting here with my wine before me I feel as though I were in a café on the Boulevards."

"An odd idea, Mr. Harley."

"Very odd," assented Harley, with a sidelong glance at once inquisitive and defiant; "but there are many odd things about this house. Felix, for instance. Here he is! the ghost of what a boy should be! I wish he were stronger," finished the father, with a sigh.

Towards Gilbert came a duplicate of his host, as bloodless, as white, as frail. The lad was arrayed in a black velvet suit with a lace collar, and looked not more than ten years of age. In his pinched features, Tresham could descry a likeness to the father, and the wan smile with which he greeted his new tutor was reflected at the moment in the pale lips of Mr. Harley. Tresham never beheld a more pitiful sight than these exhausted creatures, who were suffering for the sins of their race.

"This is Mr. Tresham, my boy," said Harley, drawing

his son towards him. "Shake hands with your tutor, Felix."

The lad put out a thin hand and weakly pressed that extended to him by Gilbert. He was by no means shy, nor was he on the other hand forward: his listless nature seemed incapable of asserting itself either way. He simply greeted his tutor with languid indifference, and afterwards returned to the end of the library, where he buried himself in a big book. There was something painful in the lifelessness of so young a child.

"You must change all that," said Harley, indicating his son's occupation; "the lad is killing himself through his brains."

"With your permission I shall not keep him too close to his books," observed Gilbert, who had been reflecting on his mode of procedure. "The boy must stay in the open air. Can he swim, Mr. Harley—or row, or ride?"

"He can do none of these things," replied Harley, with a mortified look. "I am sorry to say it, Mr. Tresham, but the lad is a coward."

"I think that is a rather unfair judgment, Mr. Harley," said Gilbert, after a pause; "the face is not that of a coward—it expresses indifference only. Let me guide him as I think fit, sir, and I promise you he will soon wipe away that reproach. He needs exercise and open air; so I will first harden the body and then improve the brain. Unless the first is healthy, it is useless to attempt anything with the lad."

"Do what you think best, Mr. Tresham," said Harley graciously, "and I have no doubt that you will be aided

well in your endeavours by my daughter. She is the exact opposite of Felix, and is never indoors. I believe she is outside now, notwithstanding the rain."

Further remark on the part of Mr. Harley was rendered impossible by the unexpected entry of the young lady in question. While Tresham and Harley had been talking she had rapped at one of the French windows at the further end of the library, and had been admitted by Felix. Now she bounded into the room, clad in a mackintosh shining with rain-drops, her face glowing with health, and her dark hair glittering with wet. As Tresham rose to his feet, he was positively startled by the contrast between this brilliant vitalized woman and the anæmic manhood of her father and brother.

"Don't be so noisy, Fay," said Harley, with a shudder, as though her sudden entry jarred on his nerves. "This is Mr. Tresham, the tutor of Felix. My daughter, Mr. Tresham."

"How do you do, Mr. Tresham?" said Fay, in a gay and hearty voice. "I hope you are not shocked by my entering by the window. But I went down to the boat-shed to see about my dingy, and came in yonder as the nearest way."

"It saves time, Miss Harley," replied Gilbert, smiling, "and time is precious in this century."

"Not with us," retorted she promptly; "we are the idlest people in the Thames valley. You will find it difficult to make us work, Mr. Tresham."

"Am I then to have you for a pupil?" said Tresham,

seeing that Harley had retired to speak to Felix, and in nowise adverse to a merry word or so.

"If you care to. I have been to school, but I am terribly backward yet. Not much better than Felix, poor child. Come here, Felix," she said, swooping down on her brother and catching him in her arms. "This is the gentleman who will make you a great man."

"Don't, Fay," retorted the boy peevishly, "you wet my clothes. I don't want to be a great man, but a poet."

"Oh!" interposed Harley satirically, "then a poet, according to that definition, is not a great man."

"I would rather be a general than a poet," declared Fay, who was rolling up her loose hair in front of a mirror. "I wish I had been born a man."

Privately, Gilbert thought she had more of the masculine element in her than had her father or brother; but of course he did not venture to express so bold an opinion. He was greatly attracted by the exuberant vitality of this girl, and wondered how the exhausted tree of the Harleys had borne so lusty a blossom. Her presence in the room was like a breath of salt sea air penetrating the sickly atmosphere of a hot-house; and her bright manner and merry voice quite dispelled the gloom which he had experienced since entering the library.

But he had little time for these reflections, for Fay, declaring that she had to be up early for a row on the river, bade them good-night, and swept out of the room like a whirlwind. With her departed all the feeling of reality, and Gilbert once more became conscious that

the library was ghost-like and uncanny. Like the prince in Tennyson's poem he felt as though he moved amid a world of ghosts.

"My daughter's manner is rather trying to one's nerves," said Harley, in an apologetic tone, "but I wish Felix was more like her."

"Oh, Felix will soon be as fond of the river as Miss Harley appears to be," said Gilbert, taking the boy's hand. "We are going to be excellent friends, are we not, Felix?"

"Oh yes," replied the lad passively, and slipped away to his reading, whither he was followed by his tutor.

"Come, Felix," said he laughingly, closing the book, "you are under my charge now, and as a first exercise of my authority I must ask you to go to bed at once. It is not good for little boys to stay up so late."

"Very well, sir; good-night," replied Felix, with the same indifference, and left the room in a weary manner, as though he were worn out.

"What do you think of him, Mr. Tresham?" asked Harley anxiously; "will you be able to make anything of him?"

"It is rather hard to say at present," replied Gilbert dubiously. "I'll try, and if I can make him like his sister I shall be more than satisfied. And now, Mr. Harley," he added, holding out his hand, "if you will permit me I shall say good-night also, as I am weary with my journey."

"Good-night, Mr. Tresham," said Harley, with a languid shake. "I like you, and think we shall get on very well together."

After which intimation of good-will, Gilbert retired to think over his first experience in the Priory. It was an odd one, but subsequent events at the Priory proved of so strange a nature, that he no longer wondered at his curious reception by the curious inhabitants of this ghostly mansion.

CHAPTER III

TRESHAM'S DIARY—SUSPICION

June 1st.—I have now been over a fortnight here, and I am more perplexed than ever at the singularity of this household. The air is charged with mystery, which affects the mansion and its inmates; but what such mystery may be I have not the slightest chance of discovering. The domestic arrangements are well ordered and admirably carried out, the servants are attentive and deferential, and there is no lack of money to render life easy. Yet withal I do not like the idea of continuing under this roof, as the influence of the place is anything but healthy. I seem to be waiting for the happening of some event—what I know not—and the suspense is at once trying and tantalizing.

It is a beautiful old place: on three sides the grey walls of the house; on the fourth, the broad-breasted Thames; and within this quadrangle green lawns, ancient trees in the full glory of their summer foliage, and flower-beds brilliant with colour. My rooms are

in the east wing, which stretches riverwards, and I look out of my windows at the west wing, which directly faces them. This latter is shut up, as the house is too large for its company; and with its curtainless windows and closed doors it presents a somewhat desolate air. Here local opinion holds that a ghost resides—the spectre of a mediæval monk who makes things unpleasant by revisiting the scenes of his earthly life. Curious in such mystical matters, I have frequently watched the west wing at midnight; but I have been punished for such folly by seeing no sign of the phantom, and by catching a bad cold. Since my experience in that way I have left the haunted house severely alone. The White Prior—as the ghost is called—affects the disused chapel at the end of the west wing, verging on the river.

Admission is gained to the quadrangle through a covered archway slanting diagonally through the house on the west side. This leads to the park, and a winding drive down to the gates, which are usually kept closed, as though Mr. Harley expected a siege. In front of the west wing a fine line of oaks stretches to the river, and as they are now in full leaf, they mask, to some extent, the dreary desolation of the house behind. From the lawn steps lead down to the river; and across the stream stretch fertile fields, and still further rise wooded heights which close the view very pleasantly. On the left of the quadrangle there is a boat-house where the madcap, Miss Fay, keeps her dingy, and in this she is constantly on the river. A terrace runs along the main building facing the river, and is diversified with

marble statues copied from Greek masterpieces. On the whole this country-house fulfils Tennyson's words, as a house of ancient peace, for at all times, and under all lights, dawn and morn and twilight, it is one of the most beautiful places I have seen. A man could do worse than dream away his life in so tranquil a nook, but here the tranquillity is pictorial, for the restless feeling which pervades the whole house is inimical to poetic dreams and lazy days.

After which sufficiently vague picture of my surroundings, I must break off for the present, and retire to rest, for it is long past midnight. I have just looked out at the west wing, but see no sign of its saintly spectre. . . .

June 12th.—Five people here puzzle me greatly, and as I wish to note them closely, it may be as well to set down their particular characteristics in detail.

Mr. Harley: He is a strange creature, as changeable as a weathercock, as whimsical as a woman. For days he will sit in that horrible room of the mirrors, and look at his thin figure indefinitely repeated on all sides; then changing from taciturnity to loquacity, he will emerge from his retirement to make himself agreeable. He is a well-read and largely-travelled man; so to an inexperienced youth like myself his company is decidedly pleasant. When in his good-humoured fits he invites me to join him at the dinner-table, and pours forth a mind stored with memories of foreign climes, of foreign courts, and numerous famous people. He has been everywhere, as appears from his intimate knowledge with the four quarters of the world; he has seen every-

thing and every one: so he can amuse for hours without tiring his listener. Why so brilliant a man should shut himself up in seclusion puzzles me: he is fitted to shine in society, yet prefers the fantasy of his library, untenanted save by himself and his reflection in the mirrors. During his silent fits—as I call them—he is only attended by Jasper, though how he can endure the company of that sinister mute is more than I can understand.

Jasper is not a human being, but a creation of fiction who has in some unexplained way escaped from a novel into real life. He appears to have taken a dislike to me, and when I venture within the precincts of the library, he invariably produces a card inscribed "Go away"; as it would be folly to quarrel with the poor creature, I laugh and obey. His mode of making himself understood by means of the cards is decidedly original. Written by himself in a neat round-hand, every emergency is provided against by the remarks thereon. Sometimes he combines two or three cards, so as to form a sentence, but for the most part one suffices to explain his purpose. When Mr. Harley wants me at the table Jasper's card of invitation is worded "Dinner," whereat I nod, and he disappears. The other day he showed me a card on which was written, "Don't watch the west wing," from which I guessed that he knew of my midnight vigils. In answer to this I made some remark about the ghost; and was confronted with the word "Fool." Since then he has left me alone, and I have no doubt that my superstition has lowered me in his good opinion.

Felix: A more difficult task I never undertook than to instruct this lad. He is by no means dull, and on his favourite subject of poetry can talk volubly enough; but for the most part he is taciturn, and listless, and indifferent. The poor child is so anæmic that he appears to have no spirit, and I might as well try to vivify a lump of dough, as to induce him to take an interest in the doings suitable to his age. In pursuance of my idea regarding his health I take him out daily on the river and teach him rowing; also I instruct him to swim, and I have already asked Mr. Harley to get him a pony, so that he may become a good horseman. But the result is dispiriting, for he is indifferent to all things. He rows when I place the oars in his hands, he swims when I plunge him into the water, yet he does both with a pensive weariness which makes my heart ache. He is so thin, so bloodless, so weak that I cannot believe he will live long; but with this *régime* of open air and exercise I hope to rouse him to take a moderate pleasure in existence.

With his studies he gets on better, and is particularly fond of Greek. Arithmetic he abhors, but takes great pleasure in composition, and also in reading poetry. By means of his love for these things I hope to gradually win him over to the drier studies, but owing to his passive resistance, I fear that the attempt will take a long time. It is difficult to do anything with so flabby a creature.

Mrs. Archer: This is the housekeeper, who well bears out Barstone's description. She is stern and pale, stately and reticent, the very type of a mediæval

abbess. We have exchanged a few words, but she usually goes about her duties in silence, and rarely comes near the room wherein I study with Felix. Twice or thrice I have noticed her looking at me in a curious manner, but when conscious of my notice she has always glided away. She does not like Mr. Harley, for when he was one day giving her directions in his usual finical style, her face assumed an expression of absolute repugnance, and she made her exit from the room as speedily as possible. Jasper does not like her, and greatly resents her approaching the library. Indeed, this strange mute seems to hate all save his master, for whom he manifests a dog-like devotion, which is complacently accepted by the egotistic being on whom he attends.

Fay: I have left this young lady to the last, because I wish to dwell long on her personality. Barstone is right; she is an angel, and merits all the eulogies with which he so plentifully besprinkled his letter. How she came to be the daughter of Harley I do not know, as neither in looks nor temperament does she resemble him in the least. He is a bookish, peevish invalid, who is afraid to let the breath of heaven blow on his frail body; while she is a lusty, buxom girl, who is stifled within doors, and escapes on all occasions into the open air. Just past the age of eighteen, she is singularly free from artificiality, and behaves towards me more like a comrade than anything else. We are excellent friends, and I am more attracted by her personality than I dare acknowledge even to myself. With no position, or money, or friends, how can I hope

that she will look favourably at me? Yet her unworldliness inspires me with hope that she will choose as her heart dictates. But, alas! her heart is quite untouched, and she is as frank and friendly to me as though I were her brother. As for myself, even in the few weeks I have known her, I feel drawn to love her—pshaw, what folly! I should not set it down even here. The prize is not for me, but for Barstone, who, judging from his enthusiastic letter, is fathoms deep in love with this Diana of the Thames.

These five people are my constant associates, and one and all they keep me at arm's length. With Fay I get on admirably, as she is the most human of the five. But the elfish Felix is as reserved as his father; and the dumb Jasper, the stern Mrs. Archer, view me with suspicion. What they think about me I do not know, but so anxious have I become, I am determined to find out. What they are to one another I wish to learn. Why does Harley shut himself up in his library? Why does Jasper watch him so incessantly? and why does Mrs. Archer hate her master? Only time can answer these three questions. . . .

June 24th.—I have seen, if not the ghost, at least the light which is said to be carried by the spectre. Looking out on the moonlight sward at four o'clock in the morning, for Mr. Harley had kept me till late talking, I saw a light flitting from window to window of the dark range opposite. As the door of admission to that portion of the house is always locked, I knew it could not be the servants, and for the moment I actually believed that the radiance was supernatural.

Suddenly it disappeared, and though I watched for some time, it did not appear again. I note this in my diary, and to-morrow I intend to make inquiries as to who was in the west wing so late.

CHAPTER IV

THE PUPILS

BY these extracts from Gilbert's diary it can be easily seen how he was affected by his environment. There was no possibility of *ennui* while he remained at the Priory. His existence there, simple even to dullness, seemed to him to be but the prelude to some tragedy. The apparent placidity of successive days concealed a constant unrest, an indescribable menace; there was an uneasy feeling in the air, a sense of mystery, of danger, which strung up his nerves, and rendered him expectant of a bolt from the blue. In such wise does Fate prepare the stage for the enacting of her tragedies.

Yet despite this unhealthy frame of mind, which was alien to his temperament, he by no means neglected his duties. Indeed he found himself less averse to teaching than he expected, but this was due to the nature of his pupils. He had two, for Fay, notwithstanding some faint objections on the part of her father, insisted upon studying with Gilbert, on learning the lessons of her brother, and leading him to a comprehension thereof. Tresham was rather glad than otherwise, as Felix was

a difficult child to manage, and only Fay, to whom he was deeply attached, could guide him in the right way. The lad inclined to poetry and day-dreams; so it needed all Gilbert's tact to induce an abandonment of such unhealthy leanings. Had it not been for the sister's aid he would have failed with the brother.

As it was, he gradually weaned the child from poems, and pictures, and abstract musings; he gave him easy tasks which, being rapidly mastered, stirred him to an ambition to conquer more difficult lessons. While teaching him Latin, Gilbert fired the boy's imagination with the stirring tales of the Roman sway, and so led him on to study, in the hope that he might read these stories for himself. For mathematics Felix evinced a strong distaste, but when Fay gallantly took up the study of Euclid, and pored over algebra, Felix, dominated by so excellent an example, followed in her wake. His weaker mind was subjugated by the stronger will of his sister, and while it was Gilbert who placed Felix on the path of learning, it was Fay who induced him to progress thereon. Often and often did Tresham confess to himself that without this girl he would be able to do nothing with the boy.

One hopeful sign was the pleasure Felix now took in out-door sports. Tresham taught him to swim, and many a good plunge had they in the river while yet the dawn reddened the sky. Swimming led to rowing, and every afternoon Felix of his own free will would ask his tutor to take him out in Fay's dingy. Sometimes Tresham would go out with her alone, and talk of many subjects as she laid her strong young arms to the oars.

In lawn-tennis Miss Harley was an expert, and between her and Gilbert the little lad began to take pleasure in the game. This constant indulgence in out-door life led to the result anticipated by Tresham, for Felix, his body strengthened by exercise, no longer cared to creep in-doors to read a book, but much preferred being with his sister and tutor in the open air. So far had Gilbert succeeded with his unpromising subject.

Fay was greatly pleased with the tutor, and showed her liking by a constant wish to be in his society. In many ways she was very childlike, and talked so freely to the young tutor, that even had he had the will, he would not have dared to open his heart to her; she was in a state of primeval innocence, and he was unwilling to be the serpent to induce her to eat of the tree of knowledge. That he loved her was patent to himself; but she was quite unaware of his passion, and indeed, in her present state of mind, she would not have understood even had he told her of his feelings.

That two young people should be so constantly together without rousing the passion of love in the heart of one or the other was not to be expected. Fay was too unsophisticated to understand the danger, and indeed entirely escaped it, for she treated Gilbert with a frank friendship which at once pleased and annoyed the young man. He had fallen deeply in love with her, but he saw plainly enough that she had no understanding of the situation. To her he was but a pleasant companion; to him, she was the one woman in the world. Yet he was afraid to tell her the truth lest it should put an end to their companionship; but he made an

effort to see if her heart was capable of understanding his passion, by introducing the subject of Barstone.

On the morning that he did so, Fay had finished a set of tennis with him, and they were now seated together under the shade of the oaks fronting the west wing. Felix was knocking the balls about in the hot sunshine, and seemed so alert and bright that his sister could not forbear commenting on his changed disposition.

"I am sure father ought to be greatly obliged to you, Mr. Tresham," said she, fanning herself with her straw hat. "Felix is another being since you took him in hand."

"I think he is," replied Gilbert; "but I should have done little with him had you not assisted me."

"I could do nothing before, at all events. It needed some one like you to wake him up; in fact, to wake us all up," continued Fay, with a burst of confidence. "Oh, you can have no idea how dull life is here."

"I don't think it is, Miss Harley."

"Oh, I don't mean now; it is very jolly at present. But before you came I thought I should go melancholy mad. I was at school near London you know, and there I had plenty of companions, but when I was finished and came home a year ago I found things awfully slow: my father always shut up in the library, Felix buried in his poetry books, and that horrid old Jasper prowling about like a ghost."

"But your neighbours?"

"Oh, they only call when my father comes out of his shell. Once in a while he behaves like a Christian and gives parties."

"Is that what you call behaving like a Christian?" asked Gilbert, unable to suppress a smile.

Fay burst out laughing.

"I call it behaving like a sensible man," she replied briskly. "Why should he live like a hermit? If he doesn't care for society himself, he should at least remember that he has a daughter to marry."

Gilbert looked down at the turf and abstractedly plucked a few blades of grass, as he answered in a low tone. Her careless remark troubled him more nearly than he cared to admit.

"Are you then anxious to be married, Miss Harley?"

"Oh, I suppose so," was the careless answer. "All women should marry, shouldn't they? I don't want to stay here all my life."

"You might find a worse place: this is very peaceful."

"And very dull. I don't like the Priory! Father is so gloomy, and infects everybody else with his misery. You are the first human being I have had to speak to since leaving school."

Here was Gilbert's opportunity, which he seized at once.

"Nonsense; you know my friend Barstone," said he significantly.

"Oh, Percy Barstone? Yes, he lives yonder," replied the girl, pointing across the river. "Sometimes he pays us a visit and talks rubbish."

"What kind of rubbish?"

"Oh, about poetry and love, and the union of hearts. I believe he wants to marry me."

"Well, you said it was women's mission to marry," muttered Gilbert ironically.

"Only to marry the man she loves," retorted Miss Harley, with great dignity, "and I don't love Mr. Barstone. If he wants to take a wife there's Jemima Carr?"

"Who is Jemima Carr?"

"Oh, she's a neighbour of ours. Manages her own farms, you know. Not pretty, and over thirty years of age. A clever ugly old maid she is, and I love her very—very much."

"Ah! but you see, Mr. Barstone doesn't. Evidently he loves you."

"He may save himself the trouble. I wouldn't marry him if he was made of gold. A silly thing who only talks of dogs and horses."

"And of the union of hearts," laughed Gilbert, relieved to find that he had no rival in his friend.

"Isn't it nonsense?" said Fay, with supreme disdain. "I don't understand half he says. But then I'm not in love. Have you ever been in love, Mr. Tresham?"

"Well, yes, I suppose so," said Gilbert, still keeping his eyes on the ground, fearful lest they should betray him. "I've been in love at least a dozen times."

"Oh, you wicked person! What does it feel like?"

"I can hardly explain."

"Do you feel worn and anguished?" asked Fay, with great intensity. "Do you refuse your meals, and groan by night? Do you walk under her window and say your heart is broken?"

Notwithstanding his feelings, Gilbert could not help

laughing at the picture of love drawn by this unsophisticated girl. Evidently Miss Harley had studied surreptitious novels at school, and was imbued with sentiment.

"No! I was never so bad as that," he said, laughing. "I don't think men make fools of themselves now-a-days."

"I don't call it making a fool of oneself," cried Miss Harley indignantly; "I think it is beautiful. How hard-hearted you are, Mr. Tresham—you would never die for a woman. Oh, how I wish some one would die for me!"

"You wouldn't like that surely!"

"Yes, I would. If *he* pined for my love and I refused him, and *he* went to India, and died with his face to the foe, and my name on his lips. Beautiful!"

"Very!—for you; but rather hard on the man. But why not ask Barstone to die for you?"

"He wouldn't!" admitted Fay, with great scorn; "he's too fond of living. Now don't laugh at me, Mr. Tresham, or I shall be angry."

"I won't laugh. You have my sincerest sympathy. But, see, here comes Felix. He looks tired out with play. Come, Felix, and sit down here," added Gilbert quietly. "You must rest for a time. It is not wise for you to exhaust yourself."

Without a word Felix, who was pale with weariness, slid down on the grass, and laid his head on Fay's knee with a contented sigh.

"Are you tired, dear?" she said, smoothing his hair with gentle fingers.

"Very. Tell me a story, Fay."

"I am not good at stories. Ask Mr. Tresham."

"Tell me a story, Mr. Tresham," said Felix, in an eager tone—"about the Romans, you know. The three who kept the bridge."

"I don't feel inclined to tell stories," replied Gilbert, yawning. "Suppose Miss Fay gives us the history of 'The Priory.'"

"Ah, you are thinking of the west wing."

"Yes; I am anxious to hear the legend connected with it."

Fay expressed her willingness to relate the tale, and was about to begin, when her father walked feebly across the lawn. He looked pale and ill, almost like a shadow in the bright sunshine, and seated himself on the seat by Fay without a word.

In the distance hovered Jasper, anxiously looking after his master. Had the dumb man known what would be the consequence of that interview, he would never have let Harley join the trio under the oaks. But no one knew the danger, no one saw the shadow in the bright sunshine. To all appearances the four were happy, but their conversation sowed the seeds of future danger, their careless words were pregnant with coming terrors. With characteristic irony, Fate brought them together to weave the web of their lives, and she must have laughed grimly at their fancied security. Only the dumb man was fearful of the future; but he had no power to stay the hand of Fate.

CHAPTER V

MONKISH TALES

"I WAS just about to tell a story, papa," said Fay, seeing that Mr. Harley made no attempt to explain his presence. "I hope you do not mind?"

"Mind, child," replied her father, raising his eyebrows. "Why should I mind?"

"It is the Legend of the West Wing."

"Oh, Mr. Tresham, would you kindly place that pillow at the back of my head? Don't you think Felix had better go away?"

"Papa!" cried Felix, in a tearful voice, "don't send me away. I want to hear the story."

"It will make you dream; it is not a healthy story. What do you think, Mr. Tresham?"

"I hardly know, sir," said Gilbert frankly. "Felix must hear the legend some time or another, so why not now? Besides, he is a brave boy, and doesn't believe in ghosts."

"He'll believe in this one," said Fay significantly, "in the ghost of the White Prior."

"That sounds interesting," observed Harley, leaning back and closing his eyes. "Go on, Fay; freeze the blood in our veins."

"Oh, the story isn't so ghostly as all that, papa. I dare say you know it."

"Certainly I have heard some talk of such nonsense. But as I have never seen the ghost myself I don't

believe in it. Pure invention, my dear child. All these old houses have their spectre. It adds to their value in the nineteenth century."

"The story, Fay! the story," cried Felix, weary of his father's speeches.

Harley shrugged his shoulders, and patted the boy's shoulder in playful remonstrance at the interruption. Then he settled himself to hear the story, and signed to Fay that she should begin, an invitation at once responded to by that impatient young lady.

"In the reign of Henry VIII. this was a celebrated Priory," she began, with due solemnity, "wealthy and holy. People came from far and near to worship in its chapel, when permitted to do so by the good monks."

"Oh!" interjected Mr. Harley, "the discipline must have been very lax if the outside world was permitted to set foot in the monastic chapel."

"It was only permitted on rare occasions," responded Fay gravely. "No woman was allowed to enter the chapel, but sick men came to pray here that they might be cured of their ills. Their prayers were always answered, and so the Priory obtained a great reputation and gained much wealth. The chapel is in the west wing, with the chancel window overlooking the river."

"Indeed," said Gilbert, starting to his feet and looking at the range of windows. "I suppose you mean the lower end. It does not look like a chapel. The windows——"

"Were all removed," interrupted Fay grandly. "This

place was given to one of my ancestors by Henry VIII., and he being a zealous Protestant destroyed all the relics of popery. Half of the west wing consists of chambers and store-rooms, but the lower half is the chapel I speak of. Only the church window is left. We will go and see it shortly."

"Indeed, you'll do no such thing," said Mr. Harley sharply. "I won't have any one set foot in the west wing. It's all dirt and cobwebs, and is better left alone. Go on with your story, Fay. I have not yet heard a word of the White Prior."

The girl was rather discomfited by her father's interruption, which seemed to astonish her considerably. As a rule Harley was silent and easy-going, so it was extraordinary that he should assert his authority so unexpectedly in so trifling a matter. Gilbert marvelled at the peremptory manner of the man, but discreetly refrained from interposing a remark. He was glad to notice that Felix, worn out by play and the heat, had fallen asleep, and so was likely to lose the gist of the story. It was not wise that a lad of so fanciful a temperament should hear such tales, and Gilbert had already regretted that he had not sent him away. Now his sleep answered the same purpose.

"The White Prior," said Fay, when she recovered her composure, "lived in the reign of the seventh Henry. His name was Simon Inger, and he was far in advance of his age in the knowledge of medicine. So many cures were wrought in the chapel during his rule that the monks of a neighbouring convent spread the report that Prior Inger had dealings with the Evil

One. I forgot to say that the monks belonged to the Dominican Order, and were white friars. Hence the nickname given to Inger of 'The White Prior.' He was given to wandering about the grounds at night, and to passing long hours in the chapel. Sometimes he went abroad and was seen gliding about the lanes like a ghost. He repaired to Marlow on occasions, and there attending to sick folk wrought his cures. For the rest he was a silent man, greatly given to penance. Under his sway the Priory grew famous, and the neighbouring monasteries became jealous. For this reason the story that Prior Inger had dealings with the Evil One was whispered abroad."

"What a dreary creature," yawned Harley; "a man without human feelings."

"Oh, but indeed he was very human," continued Fay eagerly; "before he entered Holy Orders he was a married man."

"That is strange," said Gilbert reflectively. "In those days it was not usual for married men to turn monks. What did his wife say?"

"She was dead, Mr. Tresham. In his young days the White Prior lived in London, and then gave himself up to study. He met with a noble lady and made her his wife, but she died two years after the marriage, leaving him twins, a boy and a girl."

"Twins," laughed Harley, "what a ridiculous story! Go on, my dear. This is becoming interesting."

"Grieved at the loss of his wife, Inger gave up his possessions to a distant relative, on condition that he brought up the children. Then he retired to this

monastery, where his brilliant talents soon made him Prior. On entering these walls he surrendered all interest in the world, and heard nothing of his children. They were dead to him, and he to them. Here he was known only as the White Prior, a clever man who was reported to have dealings with the Enemy of Mankind."

"That was always the fate of cleverness in those days," said Gilbert idly.

"Yes. For a long time Prior Inger did not take any notice of the scandal, but at last it became so great that there was talk of having him tried and burnt as a sorcerer. Filled with anger at this unjust persecution Inger determined to punish his enemies and to assert his innocence. He found that the brethren of a neighbouring monastery came here by night to spy out his doings. Up yonder," said Fay, pointing to a high window in the centre of the west wing, "Prior Inger had his study, and there passed long nights in making experiments in medicine, and in studying learned books. One night while thus employed he saw a face at the window, and knew that he was being watched by his enemies from the other monastery, with a view to securing the proof of his guilt. Filled with rage he dashed open the window and precipitated the watching monk to the ground. Then he descended and tried to find him. But the monk had escaped, and only after a long search did Inger see him starting down to the river, there intending to swim across and regain his own monastery."

"This is very exciting," said Harley satirically;

"quite in the style of Dumas. Well, did your Prior catch the spy?"

"Yes. He seized him as he was stepping into the water, as he was determined to take him prisoner and show up his enemies. The spy struggled, and Inger lost his temper. After a fearful fight, the Prior strangled the spy. Then he knelt down to look at the dead man's face. It was his son."

"His son," exclaimed Tresham in surprise; "what a dramatic situation. But how came the son to spy on his father?"

"He did not know Prior Inger was his father," explained Fay, delighted at the effect of the story. "It appeared that the relation who brought up the twins gave them his own name, and told them nothing about their parents. Both were quite ignorant that their father was the White Prior. When they grew up the boy, following in his father's footsteps, was filled with religious zeal, and became a monk, in the monastery where the scandal about the White Prior was started. He, hearing that Inger was a sorcerer, determined to learn the truth and to expose him. Therefore he watched night after night for proofs till Inger caught and killed him."

"How did the Prior recognize his son, after so many years?"

"By the likeness to his dead wife."

"Humph! and by that time the wife must have been dead at least twenty or more years," said Harley sceptically. "A very pretty story, but untrue."

"Of course it is only legendary," interposed Gilbert

hastily, seeing that Fay was offended. "Well, Miss Harley, and what did Inger do when he recognized his son?"

"He was struck with horror at his crime, and flung himself into the river. His body was found the next day with that of his victim, and there was a great scandal over the matter. Eventually it died away, and the pair were buried, but the relationship between them never came to light, as the distant relation who had brought up the boy was dead. But Inger's name was erased from the list of Priors for sorcery and murder, and it is on this account that his ghost is said to haunt the west wing. It flits about trying to find the books of the monastery, so as to once more inscribe his name in the list of Priors."

"A silly ghost," scoffed Harley. "Doesn't it know that the monastery is a thing of the past? I gave your spectre credit for more sense."

"What about the daughter?" asked Tresham, when Fay did not respond to her father's jest.

"She married my ancestor Aylmer Harley, and it was on account of this marriage that she asked the King to give him this Priory where Inger had rooms."

"Oh! then Dame Harley found out that Inger was her father."

"Yes; long afterwards. Some papers were found which gave the whole story of the birth, and knowing the tragedy here, all things were made clear. But the White Prior still continues to haunt the west wing."

"West rubbish!" said Harley angrily.

"It is not rubbish, papa," said Fay obstinately. "You can see the light he carries flitting from room to room at midnight."

"I saw that myself," cried Gilbert, with a start; "but of course it was one of the servants."

"Very likely," said Harley negligently, "though I have forbidden the servants to go near the west wing. I don't wish to encourage superstition. Of course there is no ghost."

"Papa," said Fay solemnly, "I have seen it."

Harley started out of his chair in angry astonishment.

"You, child! Don't be foolish!"

"I did see it, papa. Last year when you went abroad I came out here late at night as I could not sleep, and I saw the White Prior enter the door of the chapel."

"I tell you it's nonsense," cried Harley, in an excited tone. "That door hasn't been open for years and years; it is nailed up. You dreamed it, child."

"I don't think so."

"Then it must have been an hallucination. Don't repeat this nonsense to any one, Fay. I am glad Felix did not hear your story. It would frighten the poor child into hysterics. I forbid you to go near the west wing, or to say a word about the White Prior."

By this time Harley had completely lost his temper, and was so agitated that he trembled with rage and could hardly form his words. Noticing his behaviour Jasper ran across the lawn and took his master by the arm. The touch seemed to calm Harley, for he recovered his composure in some part, and submitted

to be led back to the house by the attentive valet. He paused, however, to give Fay a last warning.

"If you say a word more about the White Prior," said he sternly, "you shall leave the house."

CHAPTER VI

TRESHAM'S DIARY—A MIDNIGHT EPISODE

June 30th.—In looking over my diary, I find that I have noted my intention of asking who was in the west wing at midnight on the 24th inst. I did inquire, but I learned nothing. The servants denied that any one of them had been there, saying that by Mr. Harley's orders the west wing was locked up, and they were forbidden to enter it. I found that the belief in the ghost of the White Prior was universal both in the Priory and the neighbourhood, so I expect no one will care to enter the disused chapel after dark. Superstition is a surer preventive of any curiosity on their part about the west wing than Mr. Harley's orders. It is extraordinary how the servants believed in the ghost. The nineteenth century has not done much for them in the way of enlightenment.

To-day I heard the legend of "The White Prior" from the lips of Fay, and was much interested therein, both on account of the story and the story-teller. She certainly related it in a very dramatic manner; too much so for her father's self-control, for he spoke angrily to her when it was finished. Why he should

lose his temper over such a trifle I cannot imagine; the more so as he is sceptical of the supernatural and laughs the legend to scorn. It may be that he does not wish the Priory to become notorious as a haunted house; but if this is his objection he is too late in making it by over a hundred years. The legend is common property in the neighbourhood, and has been told by the old wives on winter evenings for generations. I have no doubt that the tale loses nothing by re-telling, and that every new narrator adds if possible to the gloom and horror of the legend. It is decidedly dramatic, and full of weird fascination. With such material to my hand it would be an oversight on my part not to make use of it for a story. But this I shall not do till I leave the Priory, as Mr. Harley might object to my giving such a ghostly tradition to the world.

I cannot help thinking that there is something more than the legend of the White Prior which makes him so firm in his refusal to throw open the west wing. If it is only the ghost, why does he not pull the building down? It is never inhabited, it is falling to ruin, it is no use to anybody, and though its destruction would destroy the symmetry of the quadrangle, yet were I in Mr. Harley's place I should decidedly raze it to the ground. In no other way will he rid his house of the horror. I suggested as much to him at dinner, but he frowned on the proposal, and gave me politely to understand that the idea was disagreeable to him. Even Jasper, who waited at table, seemed angered at my proposing so daring a thing.

I don't like Jasper, and on his part I feel certain that he has taken a violent dislike to me. My midnight vigils have become known to him, and he greatly resents my curiosity. In my bedroom yesterday I found a second card inscribed "Don't watch the west wing," and when I spoke to Mr. Harley about pulling it down Jasper shook his head angrily and nearly upset a sauce-boat over my clothes. Whatever the mystery connected with the west wing may be, he is as nearly concerned in it as his master, and objects to any mention of that part of the house. Needless to say, these objections only rouse my curiosity the more, and I am determined on some future occasion to visit the chapel, and to go through the narrow little chambers where Fay tells me the monks slept in the old days.

Fay! Every time I write that dear name my hand trembles. I have known her scarcely eight weeks, yet already I am fathoms deep in love. Had any one prophesied my fall, I should have laughed in his face; but the passion has nevertheless come to me. I am in love with an Undine, inasmuch as she has no soul and cannot comprehend my feelings. It is true that she talks of marriage, and of broken hearts and silly vows, but all this is but the folly of girlhood. She is as innocent of true knowledge as a child. And indeed, despite her eighteen years, she is only a child. When love enters her heart then will she change to woman; but the transformation is yet far off. She is friendly with me, she likes to be in my company, but beyond that, nothing more. Love-making is Greek to her, so,

fearful of frightening her, I keep my soul out of my eyes. It is a hard task but necessary, and some day she may grow to love me. Of one thing I am certain, I have no rival.

July 10th.—Felix is progressing very well with his studies, and is much healthier, thanks to open-air exercise, than he ever was before. By pursuing my present course I hope to make him reasonably stronger—but, alas! the poor child is so sickly and worn out that I fear he will not live long. His body is weak, his brain is too active, and I have to be very judicious in my teaching. Did I let him, he would pore over books all day, and sometimes it is difficult to induce him to leave the house. In this he resembles his father, who remains shut up in his room of mirrors all day—and only occasionally emerges for a gentle stroll on the arm of Jasper. It was a sin for such a man to marry and beget children. I have heard nothing of the late Mrs. Harley, but she must have been a splendid specimen of womanhood, for I feel sure that Fay takes after her. I can hardly believe that Harley, frail and peevish, is her father. Concerning the paternity of Felix there is no doubt. He is like his father in every respect, as weak, as sickly, and as irritable. The poor child is subject to somnambulism, for hearing a step in the corridor last night I went out and found Felix walking down-stairs. At once I took him back to his bed, and since then I have locked the door every night, so that he may not indulge in these midnight peregrinations. I am glad he did not hear the legend of the White Prior, for his brain is too excitable as it is, and a severe

fright might unhinge what little mind he has. Felix is a standing example of the curse of heredity.

July 20th.—At last I have succeeded in exploring the west wing without the knowledge of any one. To find the ghost of the White Prior I resolved to make the attempt; at midnight I carried out my resolve, and—I am as wise as I was before. The mystery is deepened instead of being cleared up, and I am more suspicious of Jasper than ever.

To go back to the beginning of my adventure. I first examined the west wing from the outside, in order to see how I could effect an entry without being seen by that watchful mute. Within, all doors leading from the main building to the west wing are built up save one; and that is carefully locked, the key being in Mr. Harley's possession. Clearly there was no chance of getting in there, so I strolled down under the oaks and examined the walls. Two ranges of small windows come half-way down to the river, and give light to the numerous chambers or cells formerly occupied by the monks. Thence eight large windows, extending almost from roof to ground, illuminate the disused chapel. The pointed shape and the delicate stonework of these were destroyed by Aylmer Harley the iconoclast, and some are filled with common glass set in rough leaden frames, while others are boarded up so as to exclude the light altogether from the interior. Unless I tore down the boards or broke the glass, there was no hope of getting inside, and as doing so meant discovery by Jasper, and consequently by Mr. Harley, I dismissed the idea. True there is a door, but it is nailed up,

and impossible to move. Evidently all precautions had been taken to shut up the west wing. I wonder why? That is the reason I explored it.

On the river a mighty window overlooks the water, the sole remnant of the ecclesiastical glory of the chapel. Three fluted columns spring upwards into lance-shape forms, and above, the stonework is twisted and turned this way and that into a mass of delicate tracery more like lacework than carved stone. The upper part is filled with painted glass, so also is a goodly portion between the lower columns; but on the right—looking from the river—the whole of the lower central pane is broken, and as it is sufficiently screened from the stream by a mighty oak, no attempt has been made to mend it. Jealous as the Harleys are of their mystery, they never dream for a moment that any one would espy this weak point in their armour, or, urged by curiosity, would take advantage of it. They are wrong, for, waiting until midnight, I made my entry by the broken pane.

I found time to go to Marlow and purchase a bull's-eye lantern, so I could shut off the light at a moment's notice. Wrapped in my overcoat, and carrying the lantern strapped round my waist, I waited until the stable clock struck twelve; then deeming that all was safe I crept down-stairs, let myself out by one of the drawing-room windows, and so gained the shelter of the oak walk. I must admit that I felt guilty and intrusive, for I had no right to penetrate the secrets of my employer. But so singular is his behaviour about the west wing, and so heavy is the mystery which hangs

over it, that I cannot forbear satisfying my curiosity. Nine men out of ten would do the same in my place.

All was dark, and I had no difficulty in getting to the tree which hid the broken window. Up it I scrambled, and swung myself on to the stonework. Then I turned on the light and saw that I could easily drop on to the floor of the church. The next moment I stood within, and waited with bated breath for a moment or so, to assure myself that all was well. Not a sound could I hear, and standing there in the black gloom of the church, I faltered for a moment in my purpose. Who knows what horrible things I might meet with in that darkness, into what pits I might fall, or what dangers I might encounter? I own that I felt afraid for at least two minutes.

At this moment the moon emerged from behind a cloud, and poured in her light through the windows on the left. The great blank spaces of glass, only boarded up at the lower end, admitted the light freely, and I caught a glimpse of the interior of the building. Two ranges of pillars went down either side from the chancel, and vanished in the darkness of the roof. The floor of the church was of marble, and broad steps descended to the body of the chapel. At the back of me, under the window, the high altar, stripped of all adornments, yet remained, and in the near wall I could see the niches wherein the priests sat during the service of the church. The whole place was bare and black in appearance.

Taking all this in at a glance, I moved down the church, throwing my light before me. At the end I

came on a broad flight of steps which led up to a wide door. This stood open, and I passed into a dark corridor lighted dimly from the roof by skylights. At the end of this again, the staircase branched to right and left, leading to the upper cells, while on either side I could see the lower ones, small rooms, lighted each by its window. Ascending the stairs, I found a door at the top against the dividing wall, and had no doubt that it led to the main body of the mansion. So far I knew the whole construction of the west wing.

The cells were all unfurnished, at least those were into which I looked, so seeing nothing to attract my attention I returned to the chapel. Just as I got down on to the main floor, I heard the creaking of a door, and at once shutting off my light I slipped behind a pillar to watch. To my surprise the door opening on to the quadrangle, which Harley said was nailed up, was pushed wide open, and a man entered with a bundle on his shoulder. Closing the door again, he moved into the principal aisle of the church, and set down his bundle in full moonlight. It was Jasper, the dumb man. Dumb! I heard him speak!

Producing a candle he lighted it carefully, muttering to himself the while. Hidden in the darkness of the pillar I was safe from observation, and heard him speak.

"Aye, aye," he muttered, again hoisting the bundle on to his shoulders. "This is the tenth time. If it wasn't for old Jasper there would be murder done. But she sha'n't die if I can help it. Aye, that she sha'n't."

Thus talking to himself he advanced towards the steps, and disappeared into the corridor, where I saw his light twinkling like a star in the darkness. As for myself I had heard quite enough, and resolved to remove myself from so dangerous a neighbourhood. Fortunately there was no necessity to get out through the window, for he had not locked the door. In a moment I had slipped outside and drawn it to, then walking quickly up to the terrace under the shadow of the trees I gained the drawing-room window, and so re-entered my chamber. Once there I sat down to consider what I had discovered. The shock of finding that Jasper was feigning dumbness was terrible. What could be the reason of his behaviour? What was he doing in the church with a bundle? Why did he talk about murder, and refer to a woman in connection therewith? These were the questions that I asked myself, but in no way could I answer them. The vague mystery that overhung the west wing had suddenly assumed a tangible shape. There was some terrible deed about to be done. I wondered if Harley knew of Jasper's movements; if he was aware that the man could talk. I could not say. I was helpless to further solve the mystery, and learn what it all meant.

The word murder used by Jasper struck a chill into my being, and I felt afraid as to who was to be murdered. Jasper mentioned a woman. What woman? I cannot answer these questions, so I must stop. Time alone will enable me to find out the truth. Is it to be found in the past history of the Harley family? Who can tell?

CHAPTER VII

AN INTERESTING CONVERSATION

"WELL, Tresham," said Sir Percy Barstone, when he was comfortably seated in an arm-chair, "what do you think of your new employment?"

They were chatting in Gilbert's sitting-room, and the clock had just struck eleven. Barstone had arrived at his country-house on the previous day, and, anxious to know how Tresham liked the appointment which he had been instrumental in procuring for him, had called at the Priory that afternoon. Perhaps a desire to see Fay had also something to do with the visit.

Harley, with whom the young man was a great favourite on account of his cheerful disposition, insisted that he should stay to dinner, so after apologizing for his clothes, Barstone accepted the invitation. All that evening he basked in the sunshine of Fay's smiles, and when reluctantly taken to the library by Harley, he sadly bade her good-night. He would much rather have stayed in the drawing-room listening to the girl's merry chatter, than have hearkened to Harley's prosing about first editions and black-letter folios, but could not refuse to obey his host, and so left paradise. Luckily Harley was irritable and weary, so he did not detain either his guest or the tutor long in his sanctum; thus it was they found themselves seated up-stairs for a final chat before parting for the night.

Felix, in accordance with Gilbert's wise rule, had retired to bed at nine o'clock, and Fay had followed his example: therefore, Harley having dismissed him, Barstone became dependent upon Gilbert for company. He was not sorry, as there were many things he wished to ask his friend, prominent among which was the question above set forth. As a matter of fact, Barstone was rather jealous of Tresham's good looks, lest they should make an impression on Fay. He wanted the young lady for himself, and began to question the wisdom of introducing a handsome and clever man to her notice. All of which showed that he had not yet realized that Fay was still a child, and ignorant of many things.

"How do you like your appointment, Tresham?" he said for the second time, seeing that his friend did not answer.

"I am just thinking," replied Gilbert, sedately drawing at his pipe.

"You are just thinking," echoed Barstone, running his fingers through his light hair. "Good gracious, man, does it require thinking? You are in a delightful old country-house, living with a sybarite who gives good dinners. You have plenty of time for your writing, and see a pretty girl every hour of the day. What more do——"

"That's just it," interrupted Gilbert, laughing. "The pretty girl is my trouble. I don't want to be a traitor to you, Barstone, as I saw from your letter that your affections were set on Miss Harley. But I——"

"Say no more. You're in love with her."

"I'm afraid so. I can't help myself. It came so suddenly, so strongly."

"I know, I know. I've been taken that way myself. She's an angel, and you're only human after all; but I wish you had fallen in love with some one else. Now you have come on the scene I have no chance."

"I think it's rather the other way round," said Tresham drily. "What can a poor devil like me do against a title and ten thousand a year?"

"Bosh! You're a better man of the two."

"It's very kind of you to say so. But I doubt if Mr. Harley would take that view."

"Harley be blowed!" said the lively Barstone. "So long as his own selfish whims are satisfied, he doesn't care. Fay might marry a Chinese image for all the trouble he would take. But I suppose she's in love with you?"

"My dear fellow, I don't set up for being a lady-killer. Miss Harley is in love with no one. She's yet a child, and does not know the meaning of the word. Besides, what is the use of my loving her?" continued Tresham, rather bitterly; "it's only the desire of the moth for the star. Even if she did love me, she would never marry me, putting aside the fact that I am not able to keep a wife."

"Oh, you'll be famous some day, and then the money will roll in."

"Thanks for that comfortable prophecy, but I doubt its fulfilment. However, I wish to talk of other things. So far as I can see, neither of us is likely to gain Miss Harley's hand. I have no chance, and even if I had I

promise you I would not stand in your light. You will find me a very honourable rival, if rival I be, which is impossible in a poor tutor."

"I won't have you decrying yourself in this manner," said Sir Percy, who was a man who knew the value of friendship. "You're one of the best fellows I know, and have five times more brains than are contained in this wretched head."

He laughed as he said this, and glanced in the near mirror. Therein he saw a good-humoured merry face, likely to be attractive in the highest sense to members of the other sex. Admitted that he was not so handsome or clever as Gilbert, still, he was a man whom no woman would despise as a husband, particularly as his mild physical attractions were enhanced by a title and a large income. Barstone was not without his small vanities, and he knew his worth. Still, honestly speaking, he thought Tresham had a better chance of gaining Fay than himself.

"However, let us dismiss the subject of love," he continued, filling his pipe, "and talk about—about—well, about what, Tresham? You said you wished to speak of other things."

"I do. They concern this house. What do you think of it?"

Barstone stared. He was not very quick, and failed to see the import of Gilbert's question.

"I think it's a very nice house," he said, after a pause; "old and interesting, and all that sort of thing—but——"

"Nonsense, man; you don't understand."

"I'm with you there," said Barstone drily.

"There's something queer about this place," continued Gilbert, without noticing the interruption. "You know the west wing?"

"Of course I do. It is haunted by the ghost of the White Prior. Bless you, Tresham, that spectre is an article of faith down here, but I don't believe in it myself."

"Nor do I. But I believe that there's something queer about the west wing."

"What do you mean?" asked the baronet, in a puzzled tone.

"Well, I explored that part of the house a few nights ago."

"The deuce you did! I thought that it was locked up."

"So it is, but I got in through the window of the chapel."

"Did any one see you?"

"No. It was midnight when I did so."

"This is very interesting," said Barstone, leaning eagerly forward. "Why did you undertake this midnight expedition?"

"Out of sheer curiosity. I heard the legend of the White Prior from Miss Harley, and I wanted to investigate the matter. Moreover, I wished to know why the west wing was shut up."

"Did you find out?"

"No. I found no reason that it should be forbidden ground, nor did I meet with the spectre. But I discovered something which considerably astonished me."

"What is it?"

"Jasper can speak."

Barstone looked surprised and then thoughtful.

"That is very strange," said he reflectively, "so strange that I think you must be mistaken. I have known Jasper for many years, and he has been dumb all the time."

"Nevertheless, I heard him speak."

"Where?"

"In the chapel. After exploring the house I returned to the church, and saw Jasper enter with a bundle on his shoulder by the side door."

"Nonsense. The door is nailed up. Harley told me so himself."

"Then he told a lie. The door opens quite easily. Jasper entered, and I left by it."

"That's odd. Why should Harley lie about the door?" muttered Barstone, rubbing his hands. "Well, and after Jasper entered?"

"He put down the bundle, lighted a candle, and spoke."

"I tell you it's impossible. The man is dumb. If he were not he would have betrayed himself long ago. Besides, why should he feign loss of speech?"

"Ha, that is what I wish to find out. There is a skeleton in the Harley cupboard."

"So there is in the cupboard of every family," replied Sir Percy tartly. "But why open this one? It is no business of yours."

"Ah, I see you think I am meddlesome—perhaps I am, but I don't apologize for it. My exploration was

simple curiosity begotten by the legend. Now I find there is something behind the ghost story."

"What's that?"

"A crime!"

Barstone jumped up with an ejaculation, and looked apprehensively at Gilbert.

"What do you mean by a crime? What leads you to think that——"

"Jasper's speech to himself in the chapel," said Gilbert, taking a slip of paper out of his pocket. "Here are his exact words. 'If it wasn't for old Jasper there would be murder done. But she sha'n't die if I can help it.' Now then," added Gilbert, looking up, "what do you think of that?"

"I don't know what to think of it. To whom does Jasper refer?"

"That is impossible to say."

"Why not ask Mr. Harley?"

"Because if Harley found I was meddling with his family affairs he would dismiss me. I intend to find out this mystery myself."

"Can I help you?"

"Yes; by telling me the history of the Harley family."

"I can't. All I know is that Harley is a widower with two children. He is reported to be eccentric, and has plenty of money. I know no more. But my housekeeper may," continued Barstone, rising. "I will ask her about it."

"Don't tell her what I have discovered about Jasper."

"No, I won't. But what do you think all this means?"

"How can I tell?" said Gilbert impatiently. "I must find out. Of one thing you may be certain, that it means crime."

"And Jasper—why should he feign dumbness?"

"Ah! why indeed? There are more mysteries than the ghost in this house."

Shortly after this Barstone took his departure, promising faithfully to keep silent as to Gilbert's discovery, and to ask his housekeeper about the Harley history.

"In the past of Mr. Harley," said he significantly, "we may find a reason for Jasper's speech in the chapel."

CHAPTER VIII

A ROUND OF PLEASURE

HITHERTO Tresham had only seen one side of Harley's character, but immediately after his conversation with Barstone he was destined to see another. For months the master of the Priory had been secluded in his library, more like a hermit than an English gentleman. Now he emerged from his retirement, and proceeded to entertain the whole country-side. In place of an ardent student he became fond of pleasure, and every day and night filled his house with brilliant company.

Astonished by this transformation, Tresham could not forbear remarking on it to Fay. She took it quite as a matter of course, having a lifelong experience of her father's whimsical character.

"Papa is a man of habit," she explained to Gilbert; "he does the same thing every year. For months he shuts himself up in that horrible looking-glass room, then he becomes gay and anxious for pleasure, as now. This will last for a fortnight, at the end of which time he will announce his intention of going abroad. There he will stay for a few weeks, and return to shut himself up in his library as usual."

"Where does he go to when abroad?"

"I don't remember. To some place ending with a 'bad,' I think. A German watering-place. I suppose he feels exhausted after this excitement, and wants to be set up by a course of waters. They don't do him much good, at all events; he always comes back looking worse than when he went away."

"Jasper goes with him, I suppose?"

"Of course; papa can't go anywhere without his slave," replied the girl, in a tone of scorn which she hardly attempted to conceal.

There was no love lost between Fay and her father. They were civil enough to each other, but a mutual dislike underlaid such civility. Harley objected to his daughter as a hoyden, and wondered how he came to have such a child; and Fay despised her father as an effeminate creature who had no skill in, and no love for, manly sports. It was wrong for her to do so, for the man was her father, when all was said; but

it must be confessed that Harley took no interest in his daughter, and never tried to gain her affection. To Felix he was much kinder, and indulged the child on every possible occasion; but Felix was exactly like him in every respect, and perhaps Harley admired his own character sufficiently to be pleased at its reproduction in his son. Father and son were a queer pair, and not altogether pleasant.

There was no doubt that Harley could be very charming when he liked, for no host could have been more attentive to his guests than he during the fortnight of festivities. But his amiability and hospitality had their limits. Tresham noticed that no one was asked to stay at the Priory, and thence argued that Harley was fearful lest awkward questions should be asked about the west wing. He was more convinced than ever that something was wrong.

Nothing more was discovered likely to throw light on Jasper and his feigned dumbness. Several times Tresham tried to trap him into speech; but long years of caution on the part of the valet nullified the attempt. Jasper never for a moment suspected that Gilbert had heard his midnight soliloquy, or he could hardly have kept up the farce. But he saw that the tutor distrusted him, and hated the young man all the more for his suspicions. He even tried to induce Harley to dismiss him; but the attempt proved futile, for the master of the Priory was too satisfied with the progress of Felix, both physically and mentally, to think of getting rid of so valuable a tutor.

Barstone, of course, was one of the invited guests,

and appeared constantly at the Priory. As yet he had learnt nothing from his housekeeper concerning the past of Harley, for she evidently knew no more than he did himself. Harley had lived abroad for many years; his wife had died at Trieste, and after her death he had returned to Berkshire, with his two children and the valet Jasper. There was nothing in these details likely to aid Gilbert in his search for a clue to the mystery of the west wing, so for the moment he gave up the attempt, and abandoned himself to the pleasure of the hour. When Harley went away he resolved to make a fresh attempt to find out the truth. Defeat only seemed to confirm him in his determination.

Meanwhile the attentions paid to Fay by the young men who visited at the house made him very jealous. She had not yet been presented at Court, and consequently was not supposed to be out; but she was allowed by her father to participate in the dances and tennis-parties, and expressed herself highly delighted with this first glimpse of the gay world.

"Really, Fay is quite a woman," said Harley to Miss Carr, as they watched the dancers. "She ought to be presented, and take her position in society."

"Present her on her marriage," said Miss Carr blandly. "Can't you see that Sir Percy Barstone wishes to be your son-in-law?"

"I have not observed it. She is too young to think of marriage."

"She doesn't think of it at all. But her beauty has

made an impression on our friend, and on that handsome tutor of yours."

"What, Mr. Tresham! Do you think he admires her?"

"I am certain of it. Watch how his eyes follow her every movement; he is deeply in love with her."

"I hope Fay does not encourage him," said Harley, frowning.

"She encourages nobody. She is simply enjoying herself, like the child she is. But if you are afraid of the tutor, why not let her marry Sir Percy?"

"I don't want my daughter to marry."

"Oh, that is ridiculous," said Miss Carr, who was frank even to rudeness; "you don't want a beautiful girl like that to become an old maid like me."

"You are not an old maid, Miss Carr. Thirty-five is not old."

"It's old for a woman. I shall never marry and submit to be hectored by a man."

"Then marry only some one who will swear to love, honour, and obey you at the altar," retorted Harley tartly. He rather liked a duel of words with this strong-minded female. Miss Carr laughed and showed her white teeth, in nowise offended with the speech. She was a jolly-looking woman, with a face reddened by wind and rain, and dressed in a homely inexpensive fashion which accentuated her lack of good looks. Yet she was rich and clever, managing her own affairs as capably as any one in Berkshire. Well known at hunt meetings, at market, and in the cottages of the poor, she was greatly liked, and many a man would have

been glad to marry the popular "Squire" of Bevor. But Jemima Carr was too wise to marry and thus dispose of her freedom. If she liked any one it was Barstone, whose nature was weaker than her own, and whom she could manage to perfection. But Barstone was in love with Fay, and Miss Carr admitted with a sigh that her homely face had no chance against the beauty of the girl.

The previous week she had been introduced to Tresham; and shrewd in reading character, she had taken a great fancy to the frank face of the young man. Deserted by Mr. Harley after his last rude speech, she beckoned to Gilbert, and proceeded to tease him about Fay and Barstone. She had guessed his secret with very little trouble.

"Why are you not dancing, Mr. Tresham?"

"I don't care for it, Miss Carr."

"Ah, you say that because you cannot obtain the partner you desire."

Gilbert reddened, but Miss Carr was a privileged person; so he turned off the speech with a laugh and a half-hinted denial.

"I think you are making a mistake."

"Oh no, I am not. No woman makes a mistake about that sort of thing."

"What sort of thing?"

"You know well enough," replied Miss Carr, laughing. "I don't wonder at it. She is a pretty girl. Just like her mother, who was one of the most beautiful women I ever saw in my life."

"Did you know Mrs. Harley?" asked Gilbert eagerly,

forgetting his former denial in his desire to learn more.

"Yes. I saw her ten years ago, when I was fifteen. She then lived here, and was very unhappy."

"Why was she unhappy?"

"Ah, now you want me to talk scandal," said Miss Carr reproachfully. "There was a Captain Dexter, of whom Mr. Harley was jealous. So much so that he took his wife abroad to Trieste, where they lived for some time. Then Felix was born, and Mrs. Harley died at his birth."

"And Captain Dexter?"

"Oh, I don't know what became of him. There were rumours of course, which I do not care to repeat. Really, Mr. Tresham, I don't know why I tell you all this; it cannot interest you."

"But it interests me very much."

"Why so?" asked Miss Carr sharply.

"I hardly know what to say," replied Gilbert, with some confusion. "I—I—that is—what can I say? Do you know Mr. Harley's valet, Jasper?" he asked abruptly.

Miss Carr started, and laughed in a forced manner.

"Yes, I know him; the dumb man. I have not taken particular notice of the man. Why do you ask these questions?"

Gilbert hesitated. He knew that Miss Carr knew something about Harley's past life which she was unwilling to reveal. Anxious to learn all he could, in order to solve the mystery of Jasper's speech, he resolved to make a confidante of Miss Carr. But the present

moment was not propitious, and he excused himself as well as he could.

"I have a reason for asking these questions," he said gravely, "which I will let you know if you will permit me to call on you."

"What have I to do with it?" asked Miss Carr, biting her lips.

"You can tell me something which I wish to learn. I can see that from your manner."

"Why should I tell you?"

She was obstinately bent on holding her tongue, which made Gilbert all the more determined to force her confidence.

"Do you know anything of the west wing?" he said, asking a leading question.

"The west wing," stammered she, taken aback. "I—that is—what do you know of the west wing?"

"I know a great deal, but not so much as you."

Miss Carr was usually a very self-possessed person, but on this occasion she completely lost her nerve. Passing her handkerchief across her lips, she hurriedly spoke to Gilbert in a low tone.

"I am going to town to-morrow for a week. Call at Bevor at the end of that time and I will tell you all I know. I am not sure if I am wise in doing so, but I am sorry for the poor girl."

"For Miss Harley?"

"Yes, I am more than sorry—I am afraid. Hush! here is Mr. Harley. Not a word. Well, Mr. Harley," she said, turning to that gentleman, "Mr. Tresham has

been talking to me about Felix. He is improving, it seems."

"More than I should have thought possible," said Harley graciously, "for which I have to thank Mr. Tresham. But, Miss Carr, let me take you in to supper."

She bowed and took his arm, and cast a significant look at Gilbert as she passed out of the room. He, connecting her speech with that of Jasper's in the chapel, leaned against the wall, almost unable to speak. She was afraid for Fay—and Jasper? With white lips Tresham muttered the speech he had heard.

"If it was not for old Jasper there would be murder. She shall not die if I can help it." A crime was referred to. And Fay—— Tresham felt sick with apprehension.

CHAPTER IX

EXIT MR. HARLEY

REMEMBERING what Fay had said concerning her father's methodical habits, Gilbert was not astonished when Harley announced his intention of going abroad. For more than a fortnight he had entertained the country-side, and now began to show signs of fatigue and of nervous irritability. Frail as he was, the strain was too great, and Tresham thought him wise in seeking a change of air for his health's sake. During the period which elapsed between the ball and his de-

parture, he reverted to his solitary habits, and shut himself up in the library. The man was odd in the extreme.

Then it was that Jasper became more important than ever. He was rarely absent from his master's side, and busied himself with preparations for departure. Harley did not even come to dinner, but had his meals served up in his own room, so that Tresham dined *tête-à-tête* with Fay. Sometimes Felix joined them, but as a rule they were by themselves. Despite the warning hinted by Miss Carr concerning Tresham, not a thought was given to this state of things by Harley. Wrapped up in himself he took no trouble to assert his authority in the house, and had it not been for Mrs. Archer, the whole household would have been disorganized. For the first time during his stay Gilbert found himself thrown into the society of this woman.

She was elderly, grave, and quiet, yet with an air of good breeding about her which showed that she was a lady. The spectacle of the tutor dining alone with Fay did not please her, and seeing that Harley made no remark about the matter, she spoke to him herself. He was as usual in the library, and turned irritably as she entered the room.

"Well, Mrs. Archer, what is it?" he cried peevishly. "Am I never to have any peace? What do you want to say?"

Mrs. Archer threw a glance of contempt on the frail little figure curled up in the chair. Apparently she despised her master from the bottom of her heart.

However, she controlled her feelings, and spoke calmly enough.

"I wish to know, sir, if you intend to dine here till you leave for Germany?"

"Yes; I am not fit to dine with any one else."

"But Miss Harley dines alone with Mr. Tresham. Do you think that is right, sir?"

"Why shouldn't it be right? Fay is only a school-girl."

"She is eighteen years of age, Mr. Harley, and very beautiful. Besides, you forget that Mr. Tresham is a young man. Young men, Mr. Harley, are not made of wood."

"I see what you mean. He is in love with her. So Miss Carr says; so you say. What nonsense! Tresham knows that my daughter is not for him."

"With that, sir, I have nothing to do," said Mrs. Archer very deliberately; "you are the best judge of that. I only ask your permission to take your place at the head of the table till you are able to be present."

"You?" said Harley, in surprise. "Why do you take such trouble about Fay? She is under my roof, so no one can say a word against her. Mr. Tresham is—is—well, he is not of her rank in life, and so—— However, I dare say you are right," added he quickly. "Yes, you must dine with them. I am much obliged to you for the idea. Good-day, Mrs. Archer; please do not leave the door open."

The housekeeper bowed and retired. When she was outside the room, she drew a long breath of relief.

"I believe he wants to get rid of the girl," she muttered, clenching her fist. "Thank God I am here to take the place of the mother."

As she returned to her own room she met Fay on the stairs, and gently took the girl by the arm. Despite the disparity in their dispositions and ages, these two were greatly attached to one another. For six years Mrs. Archer had been housekeeper at the Priory, and had nursed Fay through more than one illness, so that the girl looked up to her as a mother. She was far more devoted to the housekeeper than she was to her own father.

"Fay, my dear," said Mrs. Archer, with kind familiarity, "I dine with you to-night. Your father wishes it."

"I didn't think he would take so much trouble about me," said Fay, in a surprised tone. "I am very glad, dear Mrs. Archer. It was your own idea, of course?"

"What makes you think that?"

"Because nobody cares for me except you. Even Felix wouldn't miss me. I have a good mind to run away and become a governess."

"That would be foolish. It is better to be Miss Harley of the Priory than a governess."

"Yes, I suppose you are right. I sha'n't go away while you are here, and—and Mr. Tresham."

"Fay! do you like Mr. Tresham?"

"Of course I do," said Fay, with frank surprise. "He is the nicest man I ever met, and so kind—so handsome. He has more patience with Felix than I would have."

"I know he is kind, Fay. But you must not be so much with him."

"Why not?"

"I can hardly explain. You see, my dear, as a young lady you must observe certain rules, and—and— Well, you must be guided by me. It is not right for you to dine alone with Mr. Tresham."

"Papa did not seem to mind. I don't care. Now you will be at the table also, and we'll have a happy time when papa is away. He goes next week."

"Yes, he remains abroad a month or more."

"I wish he would never come back," said the girl bitterly.

"My dear, you must not talk of your father in that way. Remember you owe a duty to him."

"And he owes a duty to me," retorted Fay; "a duty which he does not perform."

This conversation made a deep impression on the girl. She began to avoid rather than court Gilbert's society; and he became aware that a barrier had arisen between them. For some time he could not understand why she was so silent when in his company; but in due time he guessed the reason. Fay was changing from a girl into a woman, and the timidity of her sex was taking the place of the frank bearing of her girlhood. More than this, she became aware that she thought a great deal of Gilbert, that a glance from him made her joyful, that during his absence she felt lonely. She was unable to explain these feelings, and was afraid to acknowledge them to Mrs. Archer. But had she known the truth, it was that the flower of love was

blooming in her heart, and that she was strongly drawn towards the young tutor. Mrs. Archer needed no explanation of these feelings. She saw what was going on, and smiled in a contented manner. Apparently she approved of this possible marriage.

Thrown daily into her society, Gilbert found her a brilliant and cultivated woman of the world, and greatly wondered that one so fitted to play the great lady should occupy so humble a position. Mrs. Archer made no attempt to explain how she came to be house-keeper at the Priory, but preserved an obstinate silence about her past, and asked Gilbert many questions about his early life. Loving Fay so dearly, and seeing that she was greatly drawn to Tresham, it was only natural that Mrs. Archer should strive to acquaint herself with the character of the young man. To the girl she stood in the place of the mother she had lost

She liked him greatly, and putting aside the question of his position and income, she did not think that Fay could have a better husband. At the same time she wished that the girl would take a fancy to Barstone, who was as amiable if not as intellectual as Gilbert, and moreover possessed a title and ten thousand a year. From a worldly point of view, it was decidedly the better match of the two. Yet Mrs. Archer, having some experience of the misery of a loveless marriage, inclined towards the penniless tutor.

All this time Tresham had not improved his acquaintance with Miss Carr, nor had he heard the promised revelation. Before the week elapsed at the end of which she had promised him an interview, he received

a letter from her saying that she was going abroad for a month.

"It is in the interests of Fay that I take this journey," she wrote, "and on my return I shall be able to afford you full information regarding many things which now excite your curiosity. During my absence I must ask you to do three things. First, to keep away from the west wing. Second, to watch over Fay on all occasions. Third, to make friends with Mrs. Archer."

"Now what does she mean?" murmured Gilbert, alarmed by these mysterious hints. "She evidently knows the mystery of the west wing, and is apprehensive lest some danger should threaten Fay. But why ask me to make friends with Mrs. Archer?"

Unable to answer this question, he sought the housekeeper without delay. Mr. Harley was just taking his departure, and the carriage was at the door, while Jasper busied himself with some last details in the library. Mrs. Archer was not to be seen, and Gilbert was about to go to her room when Mr. Harley, leaning on the arm of Jasper, appeared in the hall. He was wrapped up in a fur coat and looked singularly ill.

"I must bid you good-bye for the present, Mr. Tresham," he said languidly, holding out a delicately-gloved hand. "Go on as you are doing with Felix. I hope to find him greatly improved when I return."

"I will do my best, you may be sure, Mr. Harley."

"And by the way, Mr. Tresham, be careful of Felix at night. You mentioned to me that he walked in his

sleep. Now that is very dangerous, and should he escape your vigilance one never knows what might happen. Let him sleep in a room next to your own, and see that he does not wander about at night."

"I will be careful, Mr. Harley."

"That is all, I think. Good-bye. Felix, my son, kiss your father, and be a good boy while he is away. Fay, mind you listen to Mrs. Archer; she has my fullest confidence. I hope to return in a month."

Thus speaking Mr. Harley tottered down the steps and entered his carriage. When the door was closed he sent back Jasper to the library for a book he had left behind him and beckoned to Gilbert.

"Mr. Tresham," he said, in an eager whisper, when the young man came down the steps, "be sure you don't let Felix or Miss Harley go near the west wing. Give me your word of honour that you will prevent them doing so."

"I give you my word of honour, sir."

"Thank you," said Harley, sinking back with a sigh of relief. "Now would you mind going to the library and telling Jasper to come at once?"

Gilbert obeyed, but at the door of the library stopped short, astonished to see Mrs. Archer close to it looking at Jasper. The valet was holding before her a card inscribed, "Meddler and spy." She struck it out of his hand with a glance of indignation.

"Liar and murderer," she said fiercely. "Remember what took place at Trieste."

Jasper shrank back as though she had struck him a blow.

CHAPTER X

TRESHAM'S DIARY—THE WHITE PRIOR

August 14th.—At last Mr. Harley has taken his departure to the Continent, and the house is much the better for his absence. It is as though winter had given place to spring. Every face seems brighter, and laughter is heard on occasions, while Mrs. Archer looks ten years younger, and Fay is singing about the place from morning to night. This transformation is by no means flattering to the absent master of the house, but that it is a change for the better cannot be denied. For the first time since I came here I feel light-hearted.

Mrs. Archer turns out to be a charming woman, and presides at the dinner-table quite in a maternal fashion. I suspect that she does so by the direction of Harley, as no doubt that gentleman thinks it improper his daughter should dine alone with his hired servant. Perhaps he is right, but at all events Mrs. Archer is a welcome addition to our party, and dinner passes off much more merrily than ever it did before.

Sometimes Barstone comes over to tennis, and makes love to Fay. But she receives his advances with supreme disdain, and, if I am any judge of a young girl's heart, he has not the shadow of a chance. But am I such a judge? Certainly I cannot tell how she is disposed towards me, for of late our relations are changed

to one another—changed for the worse. Formerly, we were like brother and sister, frank, free, and outspoken; but now Fay avoids my company, and is silent when near me. Also she flushes when I speak directly to her, and by assuming a reserved manner keeps me haughtily at a distance. Hurt by this attitude I spoke to Mrs. Archer on the subject.

"I am afraid I have offended Miss Harley," said I, after Fay had been unusually disagreeable; "she is quite cross with me."

"I don't think she means to be cross," replied Mrs. Archer.

"Then what *does* she mean?"

"If you cannot tell, it is not my place to inform you," said Mrs. Archer, and went away with a smile on her lips.

All at once the meaning of her words became clear. Fay was in love—in love with me, and what I had taken for haughty reserve was simply the shyness of the awakened woman. My Undine had gained a soul—and I—but I could not believe in such good fortune. It was impossible that she could love me, whom she had known but a short period. Yet she did not love Barstone, for she was as frank with him as she was reserved with me. I began to believe that Mrs. Archer spoke truly when she hinted that I—if any one—should know the truth. Fay's avoidance of my company, her blushes, her downcast eyes—all betrayed the feelings of her heart. She loves me, as I love her.

. . . And yet I dare not tell her of my love. It would

be taking an unfair advantage of my position during the absence of her father. I think Mrs. Archer favours my suit; but then she, notwithstanding her well-bred manner, is only the housekeeper, and has no right to interfere in the matter. It is true that Harley has constituted her the chaperon of the girl, but why could he not get Fay a companion of her own rank? I do not wish to say a word against Mrs. Archer, who is a most charming lady, but I feel that the coupling of housekeeper and chaperon is not right. However, I will say nothing to Fay at present. When her father comes home I may speak—and doubtless I shall then be turned out of the house for my daring.

August 13th.—Felix has again been walking in his sleep. Attending to Mr. Harley's instruction, the lad sleeps in a chamber next to mine, and there is a door between the two rooms which always stands open. The other night I was awakened by the noise of a key turning in the lock, and started up to see that Felix, in a state of somnambulism, had passed into my room, and was opening the outside door. Before I could jump out of bed, he was in the corridor, and had glided swiftly down-stairs. I lighted a candle and followed quickly, but so rapidly had he walked that I found him in the drawing-room at one of the French windows giving on to the terrace, trying to get out. Without much difficulty I got him back to bed, and when he awoke next morning he had no recollection of his midnight walk. Since then I have locked the door of my room leading to the corridor every night, and keep the key under my

pillow. Felix cannot possibly leave the chamber without my knowledge, as his own door is locked, and the window is some considerable height from the ground.

I spoke to Mrs. Archer on the subject, and asked her if she knew the late Mrs. Harley. She said she did not, as she had not come to the Priory till two years after her death. Yet bearing in mind the two names applied by her to Jasper, I feel sure that she knows more than she cares to admit. Of one thing I am certain—she hates Harley and his valet.

“There is no doubt that Felix takes after his father,” said I, one day; “he is like him in appearance and in temperament. I can quite understand him being the son of Mr. Harley, but I confess Miss Harley puzzles me.”

“In what way?” asked Mrs. Archer sharply.

“She is so full of life and vitality that it seems ridiculous to think she is the daughter of so etiolated an invalid as Mr. Harley.”

“She takes after her mother, I believe, Mr. Tresham. They say she was very beautiful.”

“Miss Carr made the same remark.”

“Miss Carr,” repeated Mrs. Archer, in a tone of surprise; “did she know Mrs. Harley?”

“Yes, and she knows a great deal more.”

Mrs. Archer looked at me with a startled expression, and asked me what I meant.

“Well,” I answered artfully, “I can hardly explain my meaning. But I am suspicious regarding the west wing.”

"The west wing?" she echoed, with genuine surprise; "what is the matter with it?"

"Oh, nothing," I answered, turning the matter off as a jest; "only it is said to be haunted."

"Ah, you are thinking of the White Prior," said Mrs. Archer, looking much relieved. "I thought you meant——"

"Meant Jasper, for instance."

"Mr. Tresham!"

"Oh, do not look so astonished, Mrs. Archer. I overheard what you called him."

She went pale on the instant, and spoke sharply to hide her fear.

"What do you mean to infer?"

"I mean that you distrust Jasper as I do, Mrs. Archer, and it would be well for you to trust me. We may prevent the commission of a crime."

"A crime!"

"Yes." Then I rapidly told her of my exploration of the chapel, of Jasper's feigned dumbness, of his speech about murder. Mrs. Archer turned to me in rigid silence, and when I had finished motioned to me to give her a glass of water.

"You are right," she said, grasping my arm. "I know something, but I did not guess that it was so bad as this."

"Did you know Jasper's dumbness was feigned?"

"No. I thought him a villain, but not so clever an actor."

"But what does it all mean?"

"I—I can't tell you at present, Mr. Tresham. Give me time and I may." She seized me suddenly by the arm, and breaking off her speech, asked an abrupt question. "Do you love Fay?" she demanded imperiously.

"As my life."

"Then take her away from this accursed house before it is too late."

The next moment she glided away, nor could I obtain an explanation of her strange speech. That she knew something I saw plainly, but it was difficult to say why she should refuse to make me her confidant. She loved Fay, she liked me, and by her own confession she hated Harley and Jasper. Then why not come on our side, and by a timely revelation put an end to all this mystery? I confess that I feel puzzled and baffled. Mrs. Archer is a sphinx, and I cannot guess her riddle.

August 30th.—I have seen the spectre of the White Prior. It seems ridiculous to set down such a statement, but I must believe my own eyes. I certainly saw the ghost, unless it was Jasper masquerading in a cowl and robe—but as he is now at Homburg with his master, I don't see how this can be. I am not superstitious, nor do I believe that the dead return; but I must admit that this matter whereof I write is inexplicable by natural causes.

It all rose out of Felix again walking in his sleep. I foolishly left the key in the lock, and in due time the dreaming brain of the boy took him to the door. I woke to hear it close behind him, and hurriedly slipping

on my dressing-gown and slippers went after the lad. He made his insensible pilgrimage to the drawing-room window, and was fumbling at the latch when I caught him. I picked him up in my arms and took him back to his bed, but so sound asleep was he that he did not wake. Then I locked him up in his own room, and retired to sleep. But sleep would not come, for I began to think that Felix might have left the window open in the drawing-room, and could not rest until I was certain of the fact. Again I went down-stairs, and found sure enough that the boy had unlatched the window. Before closing it I stepped outside on to the terrace, for the night was warm, and I thought a breath of fresh air would do me no harm. I was well wrapped up, and there was little chance of my catching cold, so I strolled along the terrace to the point where the oak trees ran down to the river, in front of the west wing.

The moon was high in the sky amid drifting clouds, and all things looked spectral in the cold light. I looked anxiously at the west wing, but no glimmer shone therefrom—all was dark and silent. Suddenly, from the far corner of the lawn, at the very verge of the river, I saw a white figure pass across to the lower part of the west wing. In the moonlight I could see plainly that it wore a monk's dress of white, and that the cowl was drawn over the face. I admit that for the moment I felt afraid, for the silence of the hour and the recollection of the legend made me nervous. Then, determined to find out what it was, I ran hastily down the walk beneath the oaks, so as to intercept the figure before it

could reach the chapel. A cloud drifted across the moon, and darkened the scene for a moment or so. When the light once more shone out I could see—nothing. The White Prior had disappeared, and the door of the chapel was closely barred. I had heard no sound of opening lock or of closing door, so I stopped suddenly in bewilderment. If the figure was of flesh and blood it could not have got into the chapel without my seeing it, for I reached the door before it could have entered. If it was not flesh and blood, what was it? A ghost! That was nonsense, and yet how could I explain its disappearance?

I searched carefully along the wall of the chapel, and under the oaks. I walked across the lawn to the point whence the White Prior had started. Nothing rewarded my search, and I was obliged to return to bed still wondering over the mystery. It is strange and inexplicable, but I shall say nothing about it at present. I may see the spectre again, and the second time the White Prior may not escape so easily.

CHAPTER XI

A TERRIBLE DISCOVERY

WHAT with the mystery of the west wing, the spectre of the White Prior, and the half-hinted knowledge of the two women that they knew something of the

secret connected with the Harleys, the tutor felt quite confused. The whole thing smacked of the melodramatic, and looked at in the calm light of reason appeared highly improbable. Tresham tried to argue himself round to this belief, but in vain; for the conviction forced itself irresistibly on him that there was a mystery connected with Mr. Harley which had something to do with the west wing. As to the ghost, he gave up trying to explain that, save on psychical grounds.

After that one conversation with him about Jasper, Mrs. Archer held aloof and seemed indisposed to furnish the promised explanation. She only appeared at meals, and was ready to talk of all things save the one about which Gilbert most desired to speak. When he approached the subject, she either held her peace or left the room. Her conduct was inexplicable.

With Miss Carr absent, and Mrs. Archer indisposed for conversation, Gilbert found himself in an unpleasant position. He wished to talk about these matters to some one, and as he could not do so to Fay, he was anxious to find a confidant to whom he could unbosom himself. In this dilemma he thought of Barstone, who was still at his house across the river, and forthwith made up his mind to call on his friend.

To this end he gave Felix a holiday one afternoon and sculled himself up stream to the Court, which was half-a-mile up the river on the opposite bank. Sir Percy had not been over for four days, and Gilbert wished to know the reason of this sudden desertion,

which he vaguely connected with Fay Harley. He was right in his guess, as the sequel proved.

The lawns of the Court sloped down to the river's edge, and Gilbert brought his boat up to the steps without any difficulty. Here he tied it to a post, and with his blazer over his arm, for the day was hot, went up to the house. Half across the lawn he was hailed in a sleepy voice, and looked round to see the baronet swinging in a hammock between two trees. He had been asleep over a French novel, and woke up in time to see Gilbert landing.

"Hullo, Tresham; here I am. Glad to see you. Sit down and make yourself comfortable. Have a peg?"

"No, thanks," replied Gilbert, seating himself beside the rustic table, "I'm too warm with sculling. Later on I'll take a lemon-squash, and meantime solace myself with a pipe. What are you doing?"

"Reading a stupid novel," said Barstone, sitting up, with his legs dangling down to the turf. "I fell asleep over it. Pass those cigarettes, please. Thank you. Well, what brings you here—friendship, idleness, or business?"

"A desire to know why you have deserted the Priory."

Barstone half closed his eyes, and threw a tone of lazy indifference into his voice.

"Oh, I grew tired of playing second fiddle."

"Percy, you are not treating me fairly. I said if we became rivals I should not stand in your way. We are rivals. I love Fay with my whole heart and soul.

I know that you love her also. So far we are equal. Take your chance and I shall take mine. Ask her to marry you. If she refuses, then I can try my luck; if she accepts—well, I shall know that the best man has won.”

“It is very good of you to speak like that, Gilbert,” said Barstone, with some emotion, “but I saw that the matter was a foregone conclusion some weeks ago. Fay does not love me; she loves you! Therefore I stand aside and let you take the prize.”

“But——”

“Never mind making excuses, old boy. We are rivals—that is, we were rivals, but the girl has decided for herself. She loves you.”

“I am not certain of that.”

“Then you must be blind. Her eyes follow you everywhere. She flushes up when you even look at her. What chance have I against such love as that? Marry her, Tresham, and I’ll be your best man.”

“You make me feel that I have been behaving like a scoundrel,” said Gilbert impetuously.

“Why should you? The girl has decided for herself”

“And you?”

“Oh, I’ll get over it and marry Miss Carr, if she’ll have me. Now let us say no more about it,” continued Barstone, laying his hand on Gilbert’s arm; “that chapter of my life is closed. Let us talk of other things.”

“I am eternally obliged to you,” said Tresham, feeling unworthy of this loyal friendship; “but your sacri-

fice may be useless. Fay may love me, I may love her, but Harley——”

The baronet snapped his fingers contemptuously.

“Harley cares that much for his daughter. I dare say he’ll be glad to get rid of her by marriage. If he makes any opposition, learn his secret and force him to give his consent.”

“Do you think that he has a secret?”

“From what you have told me I am certain of it. Some secret connected with the west wing he keeps shut up. I can’t understand what the matter is about, but there is something in it you may depend, and that ridiculous ghost story is kept up to hide the truth.”

“Percy, I saw the ghost!”

“The deuce you did!”

“Yes, listen,” and Gilbert related all that he had seen. Barstone listened quietly, and puffed luxuriously at his cigarette. When Tresham finished he looked up with a sharp inquiring glance.

“Is that all?”

“All about the ghost you mean, I suppose?”

“Ghost be blessed! There’s some trickery in it. What else have you to tell me?”

“I don’t know that I have anything else,” said Gilbert carelessly. “What is your opinion on what I *have* told you?”

“I can’t tell till I hear the whole story. I know you are suspicious of Jasper, and must have made inquiries about him.”

"Oh, is that what you mean? Yes, I have something to tell about the rascal."

Whereupon he related his conversation with Miss Carr, the knowledge he had gained while at the drawing-room door, and finally detailed the behaviour and speeches of Mrs. Archer. When it was all over—

"Yes," said Barstone, nodding, "there is something wrong. What, I can't say. You'll learn nothing until Miss Carr returns."

"Or Mrs. Archer speaks."

"She won't speak," said the baronet sagaciously; "she has her own reasons for keeping silent."

"No, she is on our side. She is devoted to Fay. She hates Jasper."

"If so, why doesn't she put you in possession of all she knows?"

"I can't say. Perhaps she is waiting."

"Waiting for what! For the girl to be killed?"

Gilbert jumped up with a pale face, horror-struck by this significant speech.

"Good heavens, man, don't talk like that. Why should Fay be killed? What motive can——?"

"Ah, there you are. There is some motive for Jasper's speech in the chapel; there is some motive for Mrs. Archer calling him a murderer; and there is some motive for the ghost! Find the motive and you'll save the girl's life, otherwise——" Barstone shrugged his shoulders, and resumed his smoke.

"If Mrs. Archer won't speak out, I can only try

and hunt up the motive for myself," said Gilbert impatiently; "meanwhile Fay is in danger."

"No, she isn't while you are about. Keep a sharp eye on her till Miss Carr comes back. She may tell you sufficient to force Mrs. Archer to speak."

"Yes; I must play a waiting game, I see. But what do you think of the ghost?"

"I think it is flesh and blood."

"But who played such a jest?"

"Jest! My dear fellow, it may be grim earnest for all you know. I wouldn't be surprised if your ghost turned out to be—Mrs. Archer!"

"I don't believe it! What motive——?"

"Oh, deuce take the motive," said Barstone crossly; "go back and find it out. I tell you nothing can be done till Miss Carr comes back and opens her mouth. Return to the Priory and keep an eye on Fay."

With this advice Gilbert was forced to be content, and he returned in rather a depressed state of mind. As yet he had nothing tangible to go on, and the piecing together of conversations and suspicions resulted in nothing likely to lead to an understanding of the case. All he was sure of was, that Fay was threatened with some danger—from what quarter he could not divine, and that it was his duty to protect her. He swore to give himself up to that duty.

That evening Mrs. Archer was unusually gay at dinner, and chatted merrily about her life in London, a thing she had never done before. From what she said Gilbert gathered that she had been wealthy, and had

moved in the best society. Not a word did she say about her dead husband—Gilbert presumed that he was dead,—and so he learned nothing tangible about her past life.

Dinner over, Mrs. Archer took off Fay to her room to tell her more about London, for the girl was delighted to hear such stories. Felix had long since gone to bed, so Gilbert was left to his own devices. Over a cigar he meditated about the position in which he found himself, and the more he thought of it the more involved he got. Finally, as he could come to no conclusion, he dismissed the matter from his mind and retired. A glance into the room of Felix assured him that the boy slept soundly, and, having carefully locked the door according to custom, he went to bed.

Shortly after midnight he woke suddenly. It seemed to him that he had heard a cry of distress, and unable to rid himself of the impression he hastily went into the next room to see if his pupil was safe. To his surprise the bed was empty, the window was open. He rushed to it at once, expecting that the boy had fallen down while walking in his sleep, but even in the moonlight he could see nothing. It was very strange.

Hastily dressing himself he hurried down-stairs into the grounds to search for the lad, with his heart full of dread. Descending the terrace he saw a gleam of something white lying on the grass beside the river. Running towards this he found it was Felix—Felix in his night-dress, lying dead—strangled.

CHAPTER XII

FATE

THE next day the neighbourhood was startled by the intelligence that a crime had been committed at the Priory. The son and heir of the proprietor had been discovered strangled on the banks of the river. Rumour magnified the event as it flew from mouth to mouth, and the excitement increased with every hour. The Priory was besieged by curious crowds, the police arrived on the scene, and the ubiquitous reporter was visible with note-book and pencil. All knew that a crime had been perpetrated, but no one could suggest the name of the criminal, or the motive for the assassination.

It was Tresham who took charge of the affair, as Harley was abroad, and he was the only man in the house. Fay, who loved her brother dearly, was quite prostrate with grief at the unexpected tidings of his death. The servants were thoroughly demoralized by the occurrence, and had it not been for the assistance of Mrs. Archer, who retained her self-control, Gilbert would have found his position even harder than it was.

The body of the unfortunate lad was taken to his room, the police were communicated with, and then Tresham wired to Homburg telling Harley to return at once on a matter of life and death. The tutor was

utterly bewildered by the discovery, and could not think who had been so malignant as to commit so vile a crime. In his statement to the police inspector he related how he had discovered the body, and put forth the theory as to how the boy came to be on the lawn at that hour.

"He was a somnambulist, poor child," explained the young man, "and I several times followed him downstairs when he walked in his sleep."

"Where did you find him on such occasions?" asked the inspector.

"That is the curious part of it. He was always at one of the windows of the drawing-room trying to get on to the lawn."

"Why did he want to get there?"

"I cannot say; when I questioned him in the morning he knew nothing, and therefore could supply no motive for that particular desire to go on to the lawn. It must have been the result of some dream which constantly recurred, but whatever it was the poor lad was always trying to leave the house."

"Why did you not take steps to stop him walking in his sleep?"

"I did. I had the doctor to see him, and a sleeping draught was administered to calm the excitement of the brain. I had his bed placed in the room next to mine, and locked the door so that he could not get out."

"Was the door locked on that special night?"

"Yes. As I told you he climbed out by the window.

The ivy grows up all that side of the terrace, and so he was enabled to scramble down."

"But could a lad of that age have the courage to do that?" asked the inspector doubtfully.

"Not in his waking hours, but then he was fast asleep. Somnambulists undertake the most dangerous journeys. They climb roofs, they walk along parapets, they descend from windows, as in the present instance, yet they always manage to pass safely through such perils. Felix was too timid a lad to have swung himself out of the window by the ivy during the day, but when he was asleep he was blind to the danger, and so accomplished the feat safely."

"Well, I can see that he got outside in that way, Mr. Tresham. But how was it he met his death?"

"I cannot say; I found him strangled."

"It might have been a tramp," muttered the inspector wisely.

"I don't think so," answered Gilbert disdainfully. "Why should a tramp kill a poor child wandering alone at midnight? There is no motive for such a crime."

"Do you know of any one that would have a motive?"

"No. I am quite in the dark."

As a matter of fact Tresham thought of Jasper's speech when he spoke, but as Jasper was away he could not have killed the boy. Even if he had been in the house Tresham admitted to himself that it would be folly to suspect him, as the man could have no

reason for perpetrating so useless a crime. Still, the speech he had overheard hinted at murder, and Felix had been strangled. Reviewing the circumstances Gilbert was more bewildered than ever.

Sir Percy Barstone came over to the Priory as soon as he heard the news, and had a long conversation with his friend on the subject. He advised that the west wing should be searched at once.

"To what end?" asked Tresham gloomily; "no one we know of can possibly be concealed there."

"No one we know of," said Barstone significantly; "but there may be some one there for all that."

"But, my dear fellow, who can it possibly be?"

"I don't know. I wish to find out. See here, Gilbert. You know that in the legend the White Prior strangles his son. Well, you saw the White Prior, and now poor Felix is found strangled. I believe he was strangled by your White Prior."

"Rubbish! I don't believe in ghosts."

"Nor do I. Your ghost was flesh and blood, and I firmly believe that it was he who killed Felix."

"He! He! Who?"

"We may find that out when we examine the west wing. And meantime," added Barstone thoughtfully, "it will be as well to question Mrs. Archer."

"Mrs. Archer?" said Tresham, with contempt. "Is your mind still running on the supposition that she may be the White Prior?"

"Why not? And even if she isn't, she may know something of the matter."

"True enough. Well, let us go and see her. I believe she is in her room."

There was no need for them to send a message, for before Tresham could touch the bell, Mrs. Archer made her appearance at the door of the sitting-room. She looked deadly pale, and her eyes glittered feverishly. Without speaking, she crossed the room and laid her hand on Gilbert's arm.

"Have you sent for Mr. Harley?" she said, in a broken voice.

"Yes; I wired this morning. He ought to be here to-morrow evening. I shall be glad when he comes to relieve me of the responsibility."

"His arrival will not relieve you of that," said the housekeeper eagerly; "you must still watch over Fay."

"Of course I will do so," said Gilbert, with a glance at Barstone to direct his attention to the remark. "But do you apprehend danger to the girl?"

"Yes. Felix is dead. Fay may follow."

"In God's name why?" cried Barstone, starting to his feet. "What do you know of this matter, Mrs. Archer?"

"I know nothing. I cannot understand it. If Jasper were here I could guess—I could—that is—I—I—oh, I can say nothing."

She threw herself into a seat and covered her face with her hands, weeping bitterly. The young men, staggered at this emotion in so self-controlled a woman, looked at one another in astonishment. Then, anxious

to know the truth at all costs, Tresham spoke abruptly, asking the first thought that came into his head.

"Mrs. Archer, what is the secret of the west wing?"

The housekeeper looked up in surprise.

"I do not know," she answered calmly. "What do you mean? Has the west wing a secret?"

"I think so. Remember what I told you about Jasper."

"Yes; I remember. But this is not his work. He is absent."

"Can you guess who killed Felix?"

"No; I have not the slightest idea."

"Why did you call Jasper a murderer?" said Barstone sharply.

"Because it was he who made Mr. Harley jealous of his wife and Captain Dexter. It is a lie that they loved one another. They were nothing but friends. But Jasper made his master mad with jealousy, and between them they hurried Mrs. Harley into her grave. I call him a murderer, because he was morally if not legally guilty of her death."

"But I thought you did not know Mrs. Harley."

"I—I did not know her, but the story was told me by—by Miss Carr."

"Ah," cried Tresham, a sudden light breaking in upon him, "then you know what Miss Carr intends to tell me?"

"Yes. She intended to tell you of Jasper's hatred for the dead wife."

"That is all very well," broke in Barstone irritably, "but it does not help us to find out who killed Felix. However bad Jasper may be—and I think him a hypocritical villain—he is not guilty of the crime."

"I cannot help you," said Mrs. Archer hopelessly. "I cannot think of any one who would kill the poor child. And now I fear for Fay."

"Do you think that the same person who killed Felix may kill Miss Harley?" asked Tresham anxiously.

"Yes, yes. But who can it be? Oh, if I could only tell the truth."

"You must, Mrs. Archer, if it is only to save Fay's life."

"It is on her account that I keep silent," said the housekeeper hysterically. "You do not understand. Some other day—and then the disgrace! Oh, I shall go mad—I shall go mad," and so crying she rushed out of the room, leaving Tresham and Barstone greatly astonished at her strange behaviour.

"She knows something. But she won't tell," said Gilbert determinately. "We must get the police to examine her. Then she must speak."

"Meanwhile," cried Barstone, "we will search the west wing."

"The west wing must be left alone," said a smooth voice at the door. They looked up in astonishment, and saw standing there, pale and defiant—Mr. Harley.

CHAPTER XIII

GILBERT IS DISMISSED

As may be guessed, both the young men were considerably astonished at seeing Mr. Harley so unexpectedly. He must have left Homburg before the wire recalling him was sent off. The thought flashed through both their minds that he could not know of his son's death, but a glance at his worn face revealed that he was already possessed of such knowledge.

"Yes," he said, in answer to their inquiring looks. "I have just heard of my loss."

"I thought you were in Homburg, sir," stammered Tresham, still bewildered by his employer's unexplained appearance.

"I left it three days ago, and after a few hours in Paris and London came on here," said Harley, sinking into a chair. "I had a premonition that something was wrong. I was right, it seems. Why did you not look after my son, sir?" he added, turning fiercely on Gilbert.

"I did look after him, Mr. Harley."

"Then how was it that he got on to the lawn at midnight? You knew he was a somnambulist. I warned you the last thing before I left. Why did you not watch him—lock his door?"

"I did lock his door," said Gilbert gently: he could

not be angry with the grief-stricken father. "But he escaped by the window."

"What matter how he escaped, sir? You should have looked after him. My poor child! Who killed him?"

"No one knows."

"What do the police say?"

"They are quite in the dark, sir."

"So like the police," sneered Harley, rising to his feet. "They talk and talk and talk. Nothing else—nothing else."

"We'll hear what they say at the inquest, Mr. Harley," said Barstone, as the old man went to the door. He started at the word.

"Inquest! Is there to be an inquest?" he demanded anxiously.

"Yes; to-morrow. Then we may learn the truth."

"I hope so—I hope so," muttered Harley feverishly; "but what were you saying about the west wing?"

"I suggested that it should be explored to see if any one is hiding there who is likely to have killed Felix."

It was Barstone who spoke, and Harley turned towards him with a searching look as though he would read his soul.

"What reason have you to believe that the assassin is in the west wing?"

"It is my idea," said Tresham quickly. "I saw some one disguised as the White Prior cross the lawn and disappear into the west wing. I believe he found

Felix wandering on the lawn at midnight and strangled him."

"You saw the White Prior?" said Harley scornfully. "Bah! you must have suffered from hallucination."

"Not at all; I actually saw the figure."

"And you believe it to be a ghost?"

"No; I am not superstitious. I believe it to be some one who is making use of the legend of the White Prior to hide in the west wing."

"I tell you that is nonsense," said Harley angrily, "there is no one in the west wing."

"Then why not let it be examined?" put in Barstone sharply.

"Because—because——"

Harley could find no answer to this, and abruptly turning on his heel left the room. The two young men looked doubtfully at one another.

"I would give a good deal to find out what all this means," said Barstone reflectively. "However, we may learn the truth at the inquest to-morrow."

He was wrong. All the evidence brought forward proved nothing. Tresham told his story of the ghost, which was received with much doubt, and his assertion that the supposed spectre had taken refuge in the west wing was nullified by the declaration of Mr. Harley that the west wing was shut up, and that no one lived therein. Somewhat to Tresham's surprise he withdrew his restriction against it being examined, and gave the police full permission to go through it.

This they did, guided by Jasper, but could find

nothing likely to throw any light on the subject. The chapel and cells were all empty, nor were there any traces of recent occupation. In the face of this Gilbert's story was discredited, and so the only clue which might have led to the discovery of the truth was set aside. Tresham would have liked to have told his story concerning Jasper, and have called Mrs. Archer to prove that she suspected the man; but this he was quite unable to do. The solicitor who watched the case on behalf of Mr. Harley took exception to the statements of the tutor, and so skilfully hinted suspicions regarding his implication in the matter that Gilbert left the presence of the coroner white with anger.

"I don't understand Harley," he said to Barstone, as they waited to hear the verdict of the jury. "He loved his son, and naturally wants to solve the mystery of his death, yet his solicitor—no doubt by his instructions—has done his best to stop me from saying anything."

"It's my opinion that Harley thinks you know too much," said Barstone, who was indignant at the treatment of his friend.

"He shall be certain of that before I'm done with him," replied Tresham grimly.

"What would you do?"

"Do? Find out who killed Felix, and marry Fay as soon as I can."

"She is under age remember."

"I know that, but I may find some means of forcing Mr. Harley to treat me fairly. I'll learn his secret yet."

"Ah," said Barstone reflectively, "the question is whether we have not been wrong about the west wing. It has been explored and they have found nothing."

"Nevertheless I still hold to my opinion, Barstone. That supposed ghost was hidden there."

"Ah! He *was* hidden. You don't say he *is* hidden. But we will talk of these things later on. Let us go in and see what the verdict is."

As they expected, the jury brought in a verdict of "Wilful murder against some person or persons unknown," and so the nine-days' wonder of the neighbourhood came to an end. Mr. Harley offered a reward for the apprehension of the assassin, and gave his son a grand funeral. Then he evidently thought he had done his duty by the unhappy lad, for when all was over he sent for Tresham and dismissed him on the spot.

"As my son is dead you must be aware that I have no further need of your services," said Harley languidly; "and, to own the truth, I am not ill-pleased that we should part. If you had looked better after the lad he would not now be in his grave."

"I think you are talking very unjustly, Mr. Harley," said Gilbert quickly. "Twice I stopped the boy from leaving the house while in a state of somnambulism. The third time he succeeded, but I was not to blame."

"I think otherwise, Mr. Tresham. However, let us part friends. I presume you will return to London?"

"No; I am going to stay with Sir Percy Barstone."

"Indeed," said Harley suavely. "May I ask for what purpose?"

"To find out who killed your son."

"A very good excuse," sneered the other, turning even paler than usual. "But I think your stay has something to do with my daughter. Oh, you need not frown, sir. I know your pretensions in that quarter, and let me tell you they are useless. Now leave me, Mr. Tresham, and I sincerely trust that I may never set eyes on you again."

Gilbert felt indignant at this insolent dismissal, but thought it folly to bandy words with one so prejudiced as Harley. He bowed and left the room. His boxes were already prepared, and in half-an-hour he was ready to leave the house. At the door he looked in vain for Fay or Mrs. Archer, unwilling to leave them without saying good-bye; but his anxious gaze was only confronted by the malignant face of Jasper. The valet looked triumphant and fumbled with his pack of cards, no doubt intending to produce one bearing a particularly insolent inscription. Tresham stopped him.

"You need not act the lie still," he said tranquilly. "I heard you speak in the chapel."

Jasper stared thunderstruck at the young man.

CHAPTER XIV

AMATEUR DETECTIVES

It must be admitted that Barstone's behaviour at this juncture was a credit to human nature. It would have converted a pessimist to Voltaire's belief that this is the best of all possible worlds. Conceive that Sir Percy was in love with Fay; that he found a rival in Tresham, and knew that while his friend remained at the Priory he had no chance of pressing his suit. By the death of Felix all this was changed. Gilbert was dismissed, his pretensions were flouted, and the field was left open for the baronet.

But in place of rejoicing over the downfall of his rival, Barstone did his best to help him in his trouble. He renounced the chance of gaining Fay's hand; he invited Tresham to stop at his house, and, to all appearances, he acted against his own interests. Clearly Percy Barstone was too good for this world, and Tresham felt that he was not worthy of such self-denying friendship. Even history has no examples of one man giving up the woman he loved for the sake of his friend. Barstone was either singularly foolish or remarkably noble. Tresham preferred to believe that he was the latter.

In due course he took up his abode at the Court, and Barstone did all in his power to make the time

pass pleasantly. But Gilbert did not wish to be entertained. All he desired was to find out who killed Felix, and to protect Fay from possible harm. To accomplish these designs he enlisted the sympathy of Barstone; and the two laid their heads together to discuss the matter.

"We shall have to become amateur detectives," said Percy cheerfully, "and find this needle in a haystack; though how we are to set about it I don't know."

"I do. We must first learn who is masquerading as the White Prior."

"That's easier said than done. You say this unknown person hides in the west wing; but as that has been examined by the police, and nothing was found, I think we can dismiss any hope of learning the truth in that direction."

"I dare say you are right," said Gilbert, with a sigh; "but for all that some one must be in the west wing, else why should Jasper carry a bundle into the chapel? Depend upon it that bundle contained food and drink and lights, which he was taking to some one."

"If so, why hasn't the some one been found?"

"Perhaps the police did not search carefully. They may have examined the chapel, they may have looked into all the cells above and below, but they certainly did not think of the crypt."

"Oh, I see what you mean," said Percy reflectively; "but has that chapel a crypt?"

"I don't know. I think it must have, like all the

Catholic buildings of olden time, and in the crypt my ghost is concealed. Do you remember how I told you the White Prior vanished?" added Gilbert, after a pause.

"Yes; you were between the door and the ghost, so it could not have got into the chapel without your seeing it. In fact, the White Prior vanished at the verge of the line of oaks like an authentic ghost."

"Precisely. Now you know that those old monks had many secret passages, and trap-doors, and other contrivances to get into their chapel unseen. No doubt they worked miracles by means of such artifices. I should not be surprised if there was a trap-door of some kind outside leading to the crypt which the White Prior made use of when he vanished."

"It is not a bad idea. Let us go and examine the place at midnight."

"Isn't that rather difficult?" said Gilbert dubiously.

"Not a bit. We'll scull down there in a dingy, and tie the boat up under the window of the chapel, where it will not be seen either from the house or from the river. Then we can examine the place at our ease."

"Very well, we will make the attempt to-night. But Fay?"

"What about her? She is all right while Mrs. Archer is there to watch over her."

"Mrs. Archer could not save Felix from this unknown murderer," said Gilbert sadly.

"Because Mrs. Archer did not look after him," retorted Barstone smartly; "but she loves Fay as much

as you do, and will protect her from all harm. You may take my word for it," continued the young man, greatly excited, "Mrs. Archer is behind the scenes in this matter. We are fighting in the dark, but she is not. I believe that she knows who the White Prior is."

"Impossible! or she would denounce him as the assassin of the boy."

"She may not be sure that he is the assassin. We are not sure ourselves. After your experience, we assume that the person masquerading as the ghost strangled Felix, but we have no grounds for such a supposition."

"But if it wasn't the White Prior, who was it?"

"Now what a ridiculous question," said Barstone plaintively. "How should I know? I know nothing; I don't know even who the White Prior is. At all events I don't think he is a ghost. However, we may get a clue to-night, when we go ghost-hunting. Upon my word I should like to take a member of the Psychic Society with me."

"Don't jest, Percy, the subject is too serious."

"I am not jesting, as you shall see to-night. At half-past eleven we will start on our moonlight excursion."

Fortunately for the success of their enterprise, the night proved calm and cloudless. The Priory and the Court were within the same reach of the river, so they had no lock to pass. Barstone steered, and Tresham took the sculls, which he used to such good purpose that in a wonderfully short space of time they shot

rapidly past the Priory. In the moonlight the great house looked wan and lonely. Not a glimmer of light could they see in its many windows, not a shadow on the smooth lawn between terrace and river. The adventurers judged it wise to slip past the silver sheet of water fronting the lawn, lest Jasper, that suspicious night-bird, should be on the look-out. But a little way down Barstone steered the light craft 'cross stream, and they glided under the leafy shadow of the trees which overhung the river a little below the chapel. Here they paused to consider their position.

"I hope your White Prior is not abroad, Gilbert, or he'll catch us," said the baronet, in a loud whisper; "just give another stroke and bring her under the windows."

"We must be careful not to be caught," replied Tresham, doing as he was directed. "See, there is no light in the chapel. Perhaps the White Prior only hunts for the books of his monastery on special occasions. Look out!"

The nose of the boat rustled through the reeds fringing the bank, and touched earth immediately in the shadow of the great oak which terminated the line stretching from the terrace. Here the two tied their craft to a root of the tree exposed by the washing of the current, and jumped ashore. So far they had succeeded in their enterprise, for not a sound could they hear, not a light or a person could they see. In the shadow of the walk, between trees and chapel, they stood silently looking out on to the silver world beyond,

which was so still and peaceful. On such a night the unfortunate Felix had strayed down to the river's brink, led thither, Heaven only knows how, by some freak of his brain, and there had met with his fate. Gilbert shuddered as he pictured the poor lad stealthily followed by the white form, and in the stillness could almost imagine the startled cry when he woke to find the cruel hands on his throat.

Meanwhile, if Tresham was dreaming Barstone was not; for he hunted round everywhere for the supposed trap-door. Gilbert joined in the search; but not a thing could they find likely to lead them to think there was an outside entrance to the crypt. That there was a crypt they soon made certain, for at the lower end of the building they found a window barred with iron, and half buried in the earth, which assuredly did not give light to the chapel itself.

"This must be a window of the crypt," said Gilbert quickly. "See, those shrubs hide it, and so small is it that the police evidently overlooked it in their search."

"Hush!" whispered Percy, grasping his companion's hand; "some one is coming."

"The White Prior!"

Down the avenue came a tall white figure bearing a light. It was descending the terrace steps at the end, and was evidently coming straight towards them. With wonderful presence of mind Gilbert drew his friend towards the oak which hung over the water.

"Climb up and watch," he whispered hastily, and swung himself into the lower branches.

Barstone followed, and in their dark clothes among the leafy boughs they hoped to escape observation while watching the movements of the supposed ghost. Now they would be able to see how it gained the chapel without passing through the door.

The figure drew nearer, and they saw it was arrayed in the white robe and cowl of the Dominican order. The onlookers could not catch a glimpse of its face, for the cowl was pulled well forward, and it carried the lantern low to the ground. At the third oak from the river it stopped suddenly, and fastened the lantern to its girdle; then at once began to climb the trunk of the tree, till its whole robe was lost in the thick foliage. Thankful that they had not selected that tree for their hiding-place, and greatly wondering at this strange conduct, the watchers waited anxiously for the figure to descend. Five minutes passed, and still the White Prior remained hidden in the foliage, while the pair speculated what he could be doing in so strange a position. All at once Tresham gripped his friend's arm with one hand, and pointed downwards with the other. Immediately below there was the supposed window of the crypt, and as from their elevated position they could see over the shrubs which masked it, they beheld a faint light glimmer therefrom.

"We have learned enough," whispered Gilbert, scrambling silently down the tree; "let us go."

"Can't we see into the crypt?"

"Not to-night; wait till it is empty. We must not betray ourselves."

Recognizing the wisdom of this advice, Barstone stepped first into the dingy and took up the oars. Gilbert followed, and picked up the tiller ropes, and in a few minutes they were spinning hard up stream. Not till they had left the Priory some distance behind did Tresham speak.

"Now I see how the White Prior vanished on that night I first saw him."

"Do you?" said Barstone, shrugging his shoulders; "I confess I don't."

"Then you must be very unobservant. While I guarded the door of the chapel, hoping he would pass through, he swung himself up the tree without my seeing him."

"Granted. But how the deuce can he get from tree to crypt?"

"Can't you understand? That tree trunk is hollow, and leads to a subterranean passage, whence the crypt can easily be gained."

"By Jove! I never thought of that," said Barstone admiringly; "what a clever dodge!"

"We will come again to-morrow night, and climb that tree ourselves," said Gilbert. "Then we may be able to hide in the crypt and wait the coming of the White Prior."

"Well, so far the mystery remains unsolved. Who is the White Prior?"

That question was destined to be answered sooner than either of them expected.

CHAPTER XV

THE REVELATIONS OF MISS CARR

AT last a clue had been discovered which might lead to the unmasking of the White Prior, and to the arrest of the mysterious assassin. Although, as Barstone asserted, there were no logical grounds for believing that Felix had been strangled by this mysterious personage, yet Gilbert had an intuitive belief that he was the guilty party. The White Prior alone wandered about the grounds at midnight, and was the only person likely to encounter Felix. Hence the tragedy.

There seemed to be no reason for the act. All that Gilbert could conclude was that the White Prior was some wretched lunatic who was kept by Mr. Harley in the crypt, and who had escaped therefrom on several occasions. When the master of the Priory and his valet were absent, the crypt was doubtless left unguarded, and so the maniac had found himself free to wander and to commit the crime. Doubtless when the thirst for blood was satisfied, the lunatic, terrified at what he had done in his frenzy, had crept back to the crypt through the tree trunk, guided to his hiding-place by the instinct of self-preservation. Only by this theory could Tresham account for the commission of so useless a crime.

But the main question was to discover the identity of the White Prior. Knowing all the inmates of the

Priory, Gilbert could not connect one with the so-called spectre. Both Mr. Harley and Jasper had been away when the crime had been committed; so, presuming that the White Prior was the culprit, neither of the two could so have masqueraded. Neither Felix nor his sister could have assumed such a disguise, as they were too young, and the former had met his death, as Tresham firmly held, at the hands of the spectre. As to Barstone's suggestion about Mrs. Archer, the idea was too ridiculous to be considered seriously even for a moment.

No; Gilbert believed that this mysterious personage was some one whom he had not seen, some one who inhabited the crypt, some one who was connected with and protected by the master of the house. Did Harley ascribe his son's death to the person so protected and concealed? Gilbert could not persuade himself into such a belief, as Harley was undoubtedly fond of his son, and would have been the first to denounce the criminal, unless—and here was the crucial point—unless the unknown was one whom Harley dare not denounce for his own sake.

Yet, as Gilbert considered, what power could such a one have over Harley? what mystery was there in the life of that frail creature likely to lead him to shelter an assassin? why was the unknown in hiding? why was he permitted by the father to kill the son, without meeting with his due reward? Gilbert held that the murderer of Felix was concealed in the west wing; Harley had so managed to mislead the officers of the

law, whom it was his bounden duty to aid, that the hiding-place in the crypt had not been discovered. Tresham could only draw the inference from this, that Harley dared not for his own sake avenge the death of his son.

While the young men were thus bewildering their brains with these riddles, Miss Carr made her appearance at the Court, and suggested an explanation. She had been abroad, and there had received information of the tragedy. Her business—which was connected with the secret of the Harleys—not being finished so speedily as she expected, a delay was thus caused, and she only returned to her home on the evening when Barstone and his friend discovered the concealed entrance to the crypt.

The next morning she came to call, thinking to see Barstone alone. The news of Gilbert's dismissal had not yet reached her ears, so she was considerably astonished when Tresham informed her he was residing at the Court.

"All the better," said she, on receiving the explanation. "I can speak more openly here than I would dare to do at the Priory."

"Dare to do, Miss Carr!" replied Gilbert, with some point.

"Yes. Do you remember our conversation at the ball?"

"Am I likely to forget it? I have been on fire with curiosity to know the truth since that evening."

"You shall know the truth now," said Miss

Carr, nodding complacently, "and very strange it is."

"Does it concern Miss Harley?" asked Barstone anxiously.

"It concerns—Miss Harley."

She uttered the name in so peculiar a manner that Tresham looked up inquiringly, and asked abruptly what it was she meant to hint.

"Hint!" echoed Miss Carr, with her usual outspokenness. "I don't need to hint, for I am authorized to tell you the whole story."

"The whole story!"

"Yes, that which deals with the early married life of Mrs. Harley."

"And who authorized you to impart this information?"

Miss Carr paused suggestively to give point to her words.

"Colonel Dexter," she said, with a burst of triumph.

The name conveyed no information to Barstone, who had not heard it before; but to Gilbert, who remembered the conversation at the ball, the utterance was full of meaning.

"Is that the Captain Dexter who was mixed up in the scandal about Mrs. Harley?"

"The same. He is Colonel Dexter now, and I went abroad especially to see him on your account."

"Why on my account?" demanded Tresham gravely.

"Upon my word, this is not very complimentary to me after all the trouble I have taken," said Miss Carr

bluntly. "Didn't you ask me to tell you what I knew about the Harleys, and hint that a suspicion was in your mind connecting their early married life with the mystery of the west wing?"

"Yes, was I right?"

"Perfectly right. I knew something of the scandal, but not all; so I went to see Colonel Dexter at Nice especially to ask him full particulars."

"Was that solely for Mr. Tresham's gratification?" asked Barstone drily.

"No, it was partly for my own. I also have my suspicions regarding the west wing; and, moreover, I am sorry for Fay Harley."

"Why are you sorry for her?"

"Because Mr. Harley hates her so."

"Any one can see that," said Sir Percy crossly. "Why does he hate her?"

"Because she is not his daughter."

Miss Carr greatly enjoyed the astonished silence that followed this revelation. Then, before her hearers could recover their breath, she followed up her advantage.

"Fay is the daughter of Mrs. Harley and of Colonel Dexter."

It flashed into Gilbert's mind how astonished he had been at the first sight of the girl, and how he wondered that so brilliant a creature should be the offspring of so etiolated a being as Mr. Harley. The mystery was solved. Fay owed her vitality, her looks, her physical splendour to Colonel Dexter.

"Does Mr. Harley know this?" asked Tresham, when he had recovered from his surprise.

"Yes, that is why he so hates the girl. She is of course ignorant of the stain on her birth."

Anxious to know how these things came about, Gilbert begged Miss Carr to tell the story, which she did without further preamble. Tortured by suspense Barstone followed the narrative with the closest attention.

"I heard part of this story from my mother, and the rest from Colonel Dexter himself," said Miss Carr, nodding her head. "I had no hesitation in asking Colonel Dexter to tell me the truth, as I wish to make use of it to protect Fay, for I verily believe she is in danger at the Priory. I tell you, Mr. Tresham, because you love her, and may be able to save her from her fate. When I heard of the death of Felix, I hurried back at once, for I firmly believe that the boy was mistaken for his sister and murdered by——"

"By whom?" cried the young men in a breath.

"Ah! that comes at the end of the story," said Miss Carr significantly. "Fay was born two years after the mother's marriage to Mr. Harley. Before that match took place the mother was in love with Colonel Dexter, but as her parents made her marry Harley, the two were separated. Harley, however, seems to have entertained no suspicion that Colonel Dexter was in love with his wife, and permitted them to be together constantly. The consequence was that Fay was born, but at that time Harley believed the child to be his own. For some

years Mrs. Harley intrigued with Colonel Dexter, and then Jasper the valet opened his master's eyes to what was going on. Filled with rage, Harley took his wife on a yachting cruise, and finally landed her at Trieste, where they took a villa and stayed for many months. Even then Harley was ignorant that Fay was not his child, as Jasper, who told him much, did not know that part of the story. About the time Felix was born, Colonel Dexter came to Trieste, and had trouble with Harley. As soon as Felix was born, Harley took his wife on board the yacht and steamed for England, with the intention of removing her from the neighbourhood of Colonel Dexter. When the yacht arrived in England, Harley said that his wife had died at sea, and had been buried in the Mediterranean. Colonel Dexter mourned over the only woman he ever loved, and then returned to Nice, where he now lives in seclusion."

"It is a terrible domestic history," said Gilbert sadly, "and Mrs. Harley was much to blame. But what has it to do with the present?"

"Simply this. That Colonel Dexter and myself believe that Mrs. Harley did not die at sea, as was asserted by Jasper and Harley, but that out of revenge the husband took her secretly to the Priory and shut her up in the west wing, where she now is and has been for some years."

"Ah!"

"Furthermore," pursued Miss Carr, enjoying their astonishment, "Colonel Dexter and myself believe that Mrs. Harley has gone out of her mind under the cruel

treatment to which she is submitted by Jasper and his master. And I believe," added Miss Carr slowly, "that the poor creature was let out on occasions so that she might kill Fay if possible. Oh, you don't believe me; but I tell you a creature like Harley is capable of any enormity. Instead of meeting her daughter she—wretched woman—met her son Felix . . . and killed him."

"Then Mrs. Harley is alive and imprisoned in the crypt of the chapel," cried Gilbert.

"Yes," said Miss Carr decisively, "and Mrs. Harley is the spectre known as the White Prior, who killed Felix a month ago."

CHAPTER XVI

TRESHAM'S DIARY—THE LOVERS

September 6th.—Words are too feeble to express my astonishment at the revelations of Miss Carr. No doubt she is right in her surmise, and it is Mrs. Harley, dangerous from lunacy, who lives in the crypt. The wonder is how the secret can have been kept so long and so well. I now see Harley's reason for not denouncing the assassin: he dare not, for his own sake, seeing that all his long-hidden iniquity would then come to light. What a domestic tragedy!

I am less astonished than I expected at the news of

Fay's illegitimacy. It always seemed an impossibility that so fine a type of womanhood should come from that peevish, bloodless creature who passes as her father. I have no doubt that her real father is a fine man—that is, physically speaking, for I don't think much of the way in which he forsook the woman he loved. If he suspected that she was alive, and exposed to the brutality of a malignant husband, he should certainly have made it his business to save her from so sad a fate. If she sinned, it was for love of him; but in this case, as always, the woman gets the worst of it, the man the best. I sincerely hope that Fay will never learn that Colonel Dexter is her father, for, judging by this one action, he is unworthy of the name.

September 7th.—I spoke to Miss Carr regarding Dexter, and from her explanation find that I have misjudged him. It appears that for eight years he actually believed Mrs. Harley was dead; and it was only when Miss Carr came to him with her tale of the prisoner in the west wing that he guessed the truth. Then it was too late for him to move in the matter, and he begged Miss Carr to see what could be done towards rescuing the poor creature. She came over to see me about it to-day.

"Now that we know the truth we must act," she said, in her blunt way. "The poor woman can't be left any longer to the tender mercies of Jasper and her husband."

"Have we the right?" said Barstone, with some hesitation.

"Of course we have the right," replied Miss Carr, with that fine contempt for law which is peculiar to women. "All we have to do is to go to Mr. Harley, and make him give up his wife."

"We can hardly adopt so direct a course," said I to this proposition. "Remember, we are by no means sure of our ground, and an Englishman's house is his castle."

"Then let us call in the aid of the police."

"I think that would be injudicious. We must have no scandal. If our theory is right, it is Mrs. Harley who killed her son. By the way, I presume there is no doubt about the paternity of my late pupil?"

"No, poor child," answered Miss Carr, with a vigorous nod; "any one could have seen he was a true son of his father. All things considered, what with his wretched body and weak brain, I think it is as well that he died."

"But not in so terrible a manner, Miss Carr. It is frightful to think that the lad should have been killed by his own mother."

"I suppose they can't punish her for it?" put in Barstone.

"No. There can be no doubt that the woman is mad," I observed; "so when the truth comes to light she will be placed in a lunatic asylum, where she will be guarded and well looked after for the rest of her life. But this must be done with great circumspection. For the sake of Fay we must have no scandal."

"Does the housekeeper know of this?" asked Miss

Carr anxiously. "You said something about her refusing to speak."

"Yes; I believe Mrs. Archer does know. And I think it is through fear of what might happen that she has been so careful in looking after Fay. I am quite easy on that score. No harm can come to Fay while Mrs. Archer is by her side."

"But if Mrs. Archer knew the horrible truth, why did she not speak about it?"

"That is a mystery," I answered, very puzzled myself on the point. "I cannot guess her reason for silence, no more than I can think why that rascal Jasper has feigned dumbness for all these years. There are yet some things connected with this matter which we don't know."

"Well, what is to be done now, Mr. Tresham?"

It did not take me very long to make up my mind, for I had thought over the subject beforehand.

"We must make another midnight excursion," said I, "and if possible get a glimpse of this unhappy woman. Then, when we know her mental state, we will call on Mr. Harley and force him to act justly."

September 8th.—We have tried and failed. Barstone and myself rowed down to the Priory at midnight, and attempted to land. It was quite impossible to do so, for under the third oak which contains that wonderful entrance to the crypt sat Jasper. He had a chair, a bottle of spirits, and a pipe, so evidently he was there for the purpose of watching. Perhaps Mrs. Harley had been unusually troublesome of late, or the perpetration

of the crime had frightened Harley into keeping her more secluded ; but at all events there sat Jasper guarding the entrance, so that the madwoman could not escape. There was no chance of seeing the White Prior on this night.

All this we saw from the boat as we hugged the further shore ; for the moonlight was clear, and I had brought a night-glass with me in case of such a contingency. In this way we managed to escape notice, and though Barstone proposed to row softly across, so as to hear if Jasper was speaking to himself, I did not think it wise to run such a risk. On this occasion we were checkmated by the presence of the valet, and there was nothing left for us but to retire, which we accordingly did. The following night we hoped to make another attempt to get into the crypt.

September 9th.—I saw Fay to-day, and had a long conversation with her, much to my gratification. It was in the morning. Percy was busy with his man of business, so, left to my own devices, I took a spin in the outrigger. I rowed down as far as Henley, passing the Priory on purpose that I might catch a glimpse of Fay. She was not visible as I went down, but on my return I saw her rowing ahead of me in her dingy. At once I caught up with her, and she greeted me with great joy.

“Let us land on the near bank,” she said eagerly. “I have so much to say to you.”

Nothing could have been more acceptable to me, so we were soon seated on the greensward under the trees.

The place was some distance from the Priory, so there was no chance of our being interrupted. At least I hoped so, but my hope proved false, as the sequel will show.

"I am so glad to see you again, Mr. Tresham," said Fay, with a look which brought the blood to my face. "You have no idea how I have missed you."

"Not more than I have missed you," I responded weakly. "But tell me, Miss Harley, how are things at the Priory?"

"Just the same as when you left. Papa shuts himself up religiously in his library, and will not let me come near him. Since the death of poor Felix he seems to hate me more than ever. I don't know why."

Poor girl! I knew the reason, but judged it best not to tell her. If it was inevitable that she should know, I hoped that the revelation would be delayed as long as possible. Feeling myself on dangerous ground, I changed the subject.

"Has the White Prior been seen again?"

"No. Both Mrs. Archer and I watched for several nights, but not a glimpse did we catch of the spectre."

"All the better, perhaps. Of course you know it is not a ghost?"

"Yes; I don't believe in such things," said Fay disdainfully; "it is no doubt some one dressed up. But who can it be?"

"Ah, that we do not know," I forced myself to say. There was no reason as yet that I should tell the girl that the supposed ghost was none other than her unhappy mother. In fact, if I could have had my way,

I should have kept her in ignorance of the whole shameful story. But such was not to be.

"What about Jasper?"

"Oh, he is as mysterious as ever, and keeps in close attendance on my father. In fact, if it were not for Mrs. Archer I should be very lonely. Oh," cried Fay, bursting into tears, "if you only knew how unhappy I am. No one cares for me."

"I care for you—Fay."

I had not intended to make a declaration of love at that moment, but her tears swept away my resolution, and in the face of her distress I could do nothing but console her. She looked up astonished at my speech.

"You care for me—you?"

"Yes, I love you—I have loved you all along. Let me take you away from that wretched house. Give me the right to defend you—to call you wife."

"Gilbert!"

She flushed and stammered, and finally put out her hand. So young was she that the situation frightened her. Holding her hand, I strove to soothe her.

"You are not afraid of me, Fay?"

"No."

"You love me a little?"

"I—I love you a very great deal," she whispered, and buried her face on my breast. I was perfectly happy. I had gained my heart's desire, and the girl I adored was in my arms. Then for the first time I realized the magnitude of Barstone's sacrifice. That he should give up this pearl to me seemed too great to

be true; that she dared love me was almost impossible of belief. Yet I held her in my arms; I kissed away her tears. We were wrapped up at that moment in one another.

A hand on my shoulder made me look up, and I saw Mrs. Archer. She looked kindly on us, as we sprang to our feet.

"You love her?" she said to me, while Fay hung down her face with deep blushes.

"Dearer than my life," I answered authoritatively.

"Then protect her. She is in great danger."

"I know it."

"I am in danger, Mrs. Archer! Gilbert! What do you mean?"

"You will learn all shortly," replied the housekeeper quietly. "Meanwhile, do not be afraid, for I watch over you. Go back to the Priory, and you, Mr. Tresham, return to your friends."

"Shall I see you and Fay again shortly?"

"Yes; in a few days."

Fay got into her boat and rowed down the river. I turned to speak to Mrs. Archer, but she stopped my speech with an imperious gesture.

"I know what you would say," she cried quickly. "Don't explain at present. To-morrow you will hear strange news."

She hurried away with not another word, nor would she stay for all my entreaties. I rowed back to the Court with that sentence in my ears—"To-morrow you will hear strange news." What did she mean?

CHAPTER XVII

STRANGE NEWS

"I CONGRATULATE you with all my heart," said Barstone gracefully; "you—you—deserve your good luck. I wouldn't say that of any one else."

He had just heard the great news, and was doing his best to make a brilliant speech. Of course the attempt resulted in a failure; it is not in human nature to heartily congratulate a man on the possession of a young lady you had rather have kept to yourself. However, Barstone came through the ordeal gracefully, but marred the effect as a whole by heaving a sigh at the conclusion of the speech. Tresham understood the meaning of that sigh, and laid his hand in a penitent manner on the baronet's shoulder.

"I can never be sufficiently grateful to you for the friendship you have shown me in this matter," he said, in a low voice, "and I feel like a brute for taking advantage of your generosity."

"You needn't. Did not the girl say she loved you?"

"Yes; she said so twice."

"Augh!" groaned Barstone; then, when he had recovered himself, went on—"You see I had no chance. If I had proposed I should have been refused. You are the lucky man."

"I am lucky," replied Gilbert quietly; "but there is

yet much to do before I can win Fay as my wife. I must make money. How is that to be done in this overcrowded age?"

"Make money?" echoed the other in amazement; "why, Fay will be rich. Her father has no end of money."

"Who do you mean by her father—Mr. Harley or Colonel Dexter?"

"I forgot that—though, by the way, I shouldn't. Miss Carr has been over during your absence, Tresham. He's dead!"

"Mr. Harley?" asked Gilbert, in an amazed tone.

"No; the real father, Colonel Dexter. If you remember, Miss Carr left him very ill. She was just in time, it seems, so that now he is dead no one need ever know the truth, and Fay will inherit Harley's money. I'm sure she ought to, if it is only for the scandalous way in which her mother has been treated."

Gilbert shook his head. He did not look at matters in so rosy a light.

"Harley hates her; Harley knows she is not his daughter. He will seize her marriage with me as a pretext to disinherit her. No, Percy, I do not expect my wife to inherit a penny. I must be the breadwinner, and since a married tutor is out of the question, I will set up a cramming establishment."

"Egad, that's not a bad idea," said Barstone approvingly; "these crammers make lots of money. You

take a house in London, and I'll hunt round among my friends to get you a few pupils to start with. Your own talents will do the rest."

"A house in London," replied Gilbert dismally. "That means money, and I'm——"

"You have me as your banker," interrupted the baronet eagerly. "My dear fellow, you must let me help you in the matter."

Tresham's heart was too full to speak, at this fresh proof of friendship. He silently held out his hand, which Barstone grasped warmly. These two honourable natures understood one another, and words were superfluous.

As the days went on Barstone became accustomed to talk about Fay, and gradually became cured of his love, which after all had not any deep root. He was a bright, careless young man, rather shallow than otherwise, but was incapable of the passionate affection which is generally understood to be the necessary adjunct of marriage. His one deep feeling was friendship for Gilbert, whom he admired above all other men; and since true friendship is rarer than roses in winter, Barstone was rather a unique specimen of humanity. Moreover, he never forgot that he had aided Gilbert to secure the hand of Fay, and so looked on the marriage as one of his own. Meanwhile no news came from the Priory for the next few days, and Gilbert wondered what Mrs. Archer meant when she warned him to expect to be astonished within the next twenty-four hours. Her prediction was not fulfilled,

for nothing happened out of the common, and Gilbert, in despair of all things, was about to call boldly at the Priory on the fourth day after he had met Mrs. Archer, when he received information which at once astonished and alarmed him.

Fay Harley had disappeared !

The effect of this announcement on Gilbert may be imagined. The fate of Felix flashed into his mind, and he dreaded lest Fay also had been killed by her mother, and her body buried in some obscure corner. Had she been so slain, Harley would undoubtedly have done his best to hush the matter up, for a second murder at the Priory would have led to a thorough investigation, in which case the maniac in the crypt would be discovered, and Harley would be ruined.

Certainly there was Mrs. Archer, who had promised to look after the girl. She was still at the Priory, and though apparently overcome with grief yet managed to attend to her duties. Tresham wondered why she did not come forward at this crisis and reveal all she knew, so as to end these horrors which were cursing the house. Felix was dead, Fay was missing, yet Mrs. Archer still held her peace.

"I can bear it no longer," said Gilbert, when he had exhausted all inquiries and learned nothing. "I will go to the Priory and see Mrs. Archer. If she does not reveal all, and aid me to find my poor girl, I shall go straight to the police and set the machinery of the law in motion."

"It is the best thing to be done," replied Barstone,

who always agreed with his friend. "In my opinion Mrs. Archer is playing her own hand. Whether it is for or against Harley I don't know, but it certainly looks as though she were playing us false. Shall I come with you?"

"No. She may refuse to open her mouth in your presence. We must be wary in our dealings with this woman."

"I don't understand it at all," said Barstone hopelessly. "Instead of getting clearer, things seem to grow worse. What with ghosts and maniacs, I am in a hopeless muddle. But I'll bet you one thing, Gilbert."

"What's that?" said Tresham curtly, putting on his cap.

"You won't see Mrs. Archer."

"Won't I? I don't leave the Priory till I do."

Subsequent events proved that Barstone was right, for Tresham returned with a glitter of anger in his eyes, and a letter in his hand. The baronet was still on the lawn, swinging in his hammock. Owing to the heat of the day he had dropped off to sleep, and was rudely awakened to find Gilbert shaking him roughly.

"Hullo! what's up?" he murmured sleepily.

"I am, and very much up too," retorted Gilbert, sitting down on the garden seat. "That confounded woman——"

"You didn't see her, I'll be bound."

"No; I saw Jasper instead."

"The deuce you did!" cried Barstone, sitting up

smartly. "And what had he to say about Fay's disappearance?"

"He said nothing. The rascal still keeps up the pretence of being dumb. But he looked very much disturbed."

"And what did you say?"

"I spoke to him about his speech in the chapel, and swore that I would tell the police if he didn't make a clean breast of it."

"Did he find his tongue?"

"Not he. Wrote on a piece of paper, pushed it into my hand, and bolted into the house. I couldn't see him again, nor could I obtain an interview with Mrs. Archer. The servant said she was not to be seen, so as I couldn't force my way into the house I left."

"Never mind Mrs. Archer. What was it that Jasper wrote?"

"One sentence, as follows—'If you bring the police here you will bring ruin on the girl you love.' The sentence is inexplicable, but it gave me some hope."

"How so?"

"Don't you see, the girl must be alive after all, else Jasper wouldn't write like that. I believe that scoundrel of a Harley has locked her up somewhere."

"Oh!" cried Barstone, suddenly leaping to his feet as a thought struck him.

"What's the matter?"

"Fay! Do you think they have locked her up in the crypt along with her mother?"

"Impossible! I don't believe that either Jasper or his master would dare to do so."

"I think they would dare anything, as they have now gone too far to retreat. We must visit the crypt to-night, and make one last attempt to learn the truth."

CHAPTER XVIII

IN THE CRYPT

ALL that afternoon and evening Gilbert was greatly agitated. His nerves were unstrung at the thought of the perils which environed Fay. That such things could take place at the present day, in a quiet English country-house, seemed almost incredible; they savoured more of Adelphi melodrama than of real life. Tresham had written novels, and had imagined extravagant plots, but now Fact was showing how weak was the power of Fiction compared with what she could do. Notwithstanding his uncomfortable state of mind, Gilbert could not forbear from commenting on the extravagance of his situation.

"If I wrote this episode of my life as a novel," he said ironically, "people would call it impossible."

"They generally do call the possible impossible," responded Barstone epigrammatically. "Do you remember the story of the old lady who could not

believe her sailor son's tales of volcanoes and flying fish, but greedily swallowed his invention of the wheel of Pharaoh's chariot being dragged to the surface by the anchor? It is the same thing here. People would rather believe in the Arabian Nights than admit that these things could take place in a prosaic country town."

"I don't blame them; the events are quite out of the ordinary. It is just as well, my dear fellow. We don't want real life to savour of melodrama."

Barstone sent over a message to Miss Carr, in the hope that she would repair to the Court and aid him to keep up the spirits of his friend; but she wrote back that she couldn't leave home at present.

"Tell Mr. Tresham to hope for the best," said the letter; "things are by no means as bad as they seem."

"I believe that Miss Carr knows something," said Barstone shrewdly.

"She has told us all she knows."

"Yes; but about Fay. She must have heard of the girl's disappearance, and would not make so comforting a remark unless she knew that she was in safety. I may be wrong, after all."

"What! You don't think we'll find Fay in the crypt?"

"I can't be certain. But if we do not find her we shall at least be able to find out the truth about Mrs. Harley—that is, if Jasper is not guarding the tree."

"I don't care two straws if he guards the tree or

not," retorted Gilbert sharply; "matters are too serious now for us to wait any longer. If Jasper objects to our presence I shall throw him into the river."

"We must avoid scandal at all costs," said the cautious Barstone. "Let us hope that it will not be necessary to resort to such drastic measures."

As night drew on Gilbert became calmer, for knowing that coolness and courage were necessary for so delicate an errand, he made the greatest efforts to control his feelings. The two adventurers dressed themselves in dark clothes, and provided themselves with a lantern and a coil of rope, this latter being taken in case it should be needed for getting down the hollow trunk of the tree. When all the servants were in bed they stole out of the house, and launched the boat in due course. Then Gilbert bent to the oar, Barstone steered the craft to mid-stream, and so they started on their journey.

The night was dark and rainy. Masses of clouds driven furiously by the wind rushed across the sky, and every now and then the pale light of the moon shimmered from amid the flying scud. The rain drove in their faces, and lashed the surface of the stream like a whip. Knowing every inch of the river Barstone steered more by instinct than by sight, and Gilbert was obliged to row slowly lest their frail craft should dash against some obstacle and overturn.

What with the elemental strife, and the thought of the errand on which they were bent, both were in a state of suppressed excitement by the time they reached

the chapel. There was no sign of Jasper on guard, so they ran the boat close in shore, and landed as speedily as possible. It was now close on midnight, and the wind was falling, while the rain passed away. Yet, standing under the oaks, they could hear the dripping of the rain-drops in the foliage and the creaking of the boughs overhead; no other sound was to be heard.

"Come," said Percy cheerfully, "the weather has done us a good turn to-night, for it has kept the dragon indoors."

"It is the third tree, isn't it?"

"Yes; here we are. You take the rope and I the lantern. Up you go."

Gilbert swung himself from the ground into the lower branches of the tree, and the baronet speedily followed. They found themselves in a dense, damp darkness, surrounded on all sides by swaying boughs and dripping leaves. Barstone pushed aside the mask of the lantern, and turned the light on the trunk of the tree. It was of an immense circumference, and gnarled with age. Like a pillar it shot up from the ground and disappeared into a thicket of leaves. Taking advantage of the light, Gilbert climbed up to the next bough and muttered an exclamation of triumph.

"As I thought," he said, while Percy scrambled up beside him; "the trunk stops half way amid the foliage, and is quite hollow. Turn the light this way, Barstone."

The light flared on a kind of jagged stump. Below

this the boughs rose up with their leaves in a kind of crown, so that it was completely masked from below. Even in winter, when the branches were bare, no one walking below would see anything but a ragged trunk stopping abruptly in mid-air amid soaring boughs. Who would think that the centre of that trunk was hollow, that it was large enough to admit the body of a man? Yet such was the case, and as Barstone shed the light down into the darkness, they saw iron spikes projecting from the inside of the hollow pillar.

"A kind of ladder," said Gilbert, in a satisfied tone. "Good! we won't need the rope. I'll go down first, Percy. Give me the lantern."

"For heaven's sake be careful, Gilbert," said Barstone, as his friend dropped into the hollow; "if Mrs. Harley is there and as mad as we think she is, you may find her hands on your throat in the most unsuspected manner."

"Not a bit of it. I can protect myself against a woman. Besides, if Fay is here she will help us."

He descended slowly, feeling carefully with his feet for the projecting spikes. As he expected, they reached to the bottom. He judged that he had now dropped below the level of the earth, and had left the tree trunk. At length his feet touched the ground, and he saw before him a narrow passage, in which a man could stand upright, which ran directly towards the crypt. Casting the light upwards he beheld Barstone descending, but as there was not sufficient room below for them both—for the passage was like a rabbit burrow—

he moved forward, and in a minute or so emerged into the vaults below the church. Here he was speedily joined by Percy.

"Well!" said the latter, in an astonished tone; "this is a dodge and no mistake. I wonder if this is the only entrance to this cave."

"I think not. You remember Jasper and his bundle. I dare say there is a trap-door in the chapel itself or in one of its cells which can be used on occasions."

The light of the lantern revealed rough walls damp and green, and thick pillars which supported the floor of the church. The flagged pavement below that part was also damp, and here and there were niches in the wall, which had no doubt held coffins in former days. The sight was disappointing to both of them, as it was scarcely what they expected to see.

"We must be wrong," said Percy, in a disgusted tone; "not even a lunatic could live here."

"We have not as yet examined the whole crypt," replied Gilbert, moving forward. "Compared with the chapel above this is only a small portion. Here is another passage. Let us see where it leads to."

The passage alluded to was directly ahead, with an arched roof, and was closed at the further end by a heavy door. Fortunately this was not locked, and opened with a slight push. Throwing the light ahead Gilbert started back in amazement at what the illumination revealed.

"Look," he said, turning to Barstone, "this is the secret chamber."

It was a large room, with a carpet of velvet pile, and furnished, so far as they could see, in a singularly rich fashion. Barstone found some candles on the table and lighted them at once. By the aid of this further light they could see better, and were astonished at the splendour of this subterranean apartment. Suddenly Gilbert walked back to the door and ran his hand along the walls. The next instant the apartment was ablaze with light.

"Electric light, no less," said Barstone, unable to control his surprise. "My word, Mr. Harley is not so cruel to his wife as we thought him. This place is as well furnished as any room in the Priory."

"Yes. But where is the occupant? I do not see Mrs. Harley nor Fay."

In truth the room was quite deserted. The rough walls were draped with rich tapestries and adorned with fine pictures. There were lounges covered with silk and draperies, and tables laden with books. Screens and chairs and footstools were scattered about, and the carpet was strewn with fur mats. All this, seen in the glare of the electric light, was very striking, the more so as the young men remembered that it was underground.

One thing struck them as peculiar. There was no sign of any feminine adornment, and they could not believe that a woman lived there. Yet, if it was not prepared for Mrs. Harley, who was it made ready for? Tresham hunted round for further rooms but found none. At the back of the tapestry, in

one corner, a staircase of rough stone led upward. Doubtless down this Jasper had descended with his bundle.

"Well, Fay is not here, nor Mrs. Harley," said Gilbert, in a disappointed tone. "Turn out the light, Barstone, and let us get back. We have found out a secret, but not that which we sought for."

Barstone agreed, and they returned through the subterranean passage. When up again amid the branches of the tree, they suddenly heard a blood-curdling shriek. Gilbert dropped to the ground and uttered a cry—

"The White Prior!"

Across the lawn fled a woman in horror, followed by the spectre, so often pursuing, now pursued in its turn. After the spectre came a man.

The man was Jasper—the woman, Mrs. Archer. But the White Prior——

CHAPTER XIX

THE TRUTH

THE two young men ran across the lawn. As the sky was now cloudless and the moon shone brightly, they could see every action of the trio. Mrs. Archer, with the white figure close at her heels, ran down to

the water blind with terror. She would undoubtedly have gone to her death had not Gilbert intercepted her. She ran into his arms and quietly fainted, while the pursuer, turned from his purpose by the intervention of Barstone, stood at bay. The next moment Jasper had his arm on the shoulder of the White Prior, and the following moment the two were rolling on the grass, the supposed spectre being uppermost.

He had his hands on Jasper's throat, and the man's face was turning black with strangulation. Barstone sprang on the Thing—it could be called nothing else—and strove to wrench it backward so as to save the valet's life. Laying Mrs. Archer on the grass, Gilbert went to his friend's assistance, and between them they managed to master his assailant. Rolling and kicking and uttering fierce cries the White Prior writhed on the sward; his cowl had fallen backward, his distorted visage was clearly seen in the moonlight. With a simultaneous cry of surprise the young men recognized the face.

“Great heavens! It is Harley himself!”

And so it was. Harley was the White Prior. Harley was the murderer, Harley was the maniac, and howled like a wild beast in the grip of his captors, while the frightened servants, roused by the cries, poured out on to the terrace, in all stages of undress. The secret which had baffled them all for so long was at last solved. Harley, whom no one had suspected, was the long-sought-for ghost, the hidden murderer!

It was fortunate that aid had come, for even with all

their strong young strength Gilbert and Barstone could not hold the murderer. Possessed by many devils, he fought and tore, and raged like a fiend from the bottomless pit, and it was only when the servants threw themselves on him six at a time that he was mastered and borne into the house. Then Tresham found time to pay attention to the other two,—Jasper who had so nearly met with the fate of Felix, and Mrs. Archer who had fainted with terror.

A cup of water brought from the river—for she was lying near the bank—soon brought her round, and she sat up with a bewildered look.

“Where am I? Where am I?” she murmured, looking round at the half-clothed group of servants. “Ah, I remember—Mr. Harley. Don’t let him come near me. He will strangle me as he did my sister.”

Gilbert thought she raved, and gently lifted her to her feet.

“You are ill. Come back to the house—to the library.”

“No, no—not to the house. It was there he saw me. Where is Jasper?”

The valet, who had recovered himself with the assistance of Barstone, now moved forward slowly on the baronet’s arm.

“Jasper is safe,” he said, in a husky voice, “thanks to these gentlemen.”

“You speak at last.”

“Yes, Mrs. Archer. There is no need for further concealment now. I have done my best to save him,

but now the world must know. Off, some of you, to Marlow, and bring a doctor to my master. Mr. Tresham, Sir Percy, come inside. I must tell you the truth."

"One moment," cried Gilbert, as the servants trooped back to the house. "Miss Harley?"

"She is well—she is safe," interposed Mrs. Archer; "she is with Miss Carr at Bevor."

"Ah!" said Jasper, darting a keen look at her, "it was you then who took her away?"

"To save her life—to save her life," muttered the housekeeper; "my sister's child."

Jasper nodded his head and went towards the house, followed by Mrs. Archer and the two young men. He repaired to the library, whither his master had been taken, and the housekeeper entering the drawing-room beckoned to Gilbert and his friend. The electric light was turned on, and she sank into a chair with a weary sigh, leaning her head on her hand. Tresham sat down near her, and looked at her with expectant eyes. With Barstone, he was now certain that the whole of these strange proceedings was about to be explained by the woman who called herself Mrs. Archer.

"I can never be sufficiently thankful to you for saving Fay," said Gilbert, after a pause; "but I wish you had told me that you had sent her to Miss Carr."

"I did not wish to tell more than I could help," replied the housekeeper. "I desired to avert all scandal, for the sake of my sister's child."

"Your sister's child?" repeated Barstone.

"Yes. I am a widow, but my name is not Archer. It is Mrs. Granville, and I am the sister of the late Mrs. Harley."

"Then she really is dead?"

"She died at Trieste. Why do you think she is alive?"

"Both Miss Carr and Colonel Dexter think it."

"Don't mention that name," cried Mrs. Archer indignantly; "he was at the root of all this trouble."

"You can forgive him now. He is dead."

"Dead! Ah, well! if he sinned he was punished. I heard of his long illness at Nice. But how did Miss Carr come to know of these things?"

"She heard rumours that some one was locked up in the west wing," explained Gilbert, "and, remembering some stories connecting Mrs. Harley with Dexter, conceived the idea of seeking him out and learning the truth. She did so, and they both concluded that Mrs. Harley did not die at Trieste, but had been secretly shut up by her cruel husband in the crypt of the chapel."

"And you doubtless thought that my unfortunate sister was the White Prior—that she had killed her own son?"

"Yes. No other solution was possible of that mystery."

"No, I suppose not," replied Mrs. Archer quietly; "but now you know that Mr. Harley played the part of the spectre, and killed Felix."

"You knew that at the time?"

"I fancied it might be so, but I was not sure. Remember, Mr. Harley was supposed to be absent at Homburg."

"Was supposed to be absent?"

"Yes. For in truth he went no further than the west wing. His departure was an elaborate farce meant to deceive the world."

"In heaven's name why?" demanded both her listeners in a breath.

"I must tell you the whole story before you can understand," replied Mrs. Archer. "Some of it I have experienced myself, the rest I have gathered from others. I must not tell you how I learned all these facts, or who are my authorities; you must take all on my word."

She paused as though to collect her thoughts, and resumed—

"Mr. Harley came of a family who suffered from neurosis. In one form or another the disease came out in all the members. With Mr. Harley it showed itself in homicidal mania. He had a desire to kill, he was a human tiger with a lust for blood. He should never have married, and perhaps would not have done so had he known the full extent of his curse; but it was only completely developed after his marriage, and then cost the life of my only sister. She was a beautiful girl, Mr. Tresham, as you can guess when I tell you that I see her again in Fay. Before Mr. Harley came on the scene, she was engaged to Captain Dexter, then but a newly-joined ensign. They loved

one another, but Dexter was poor, and my parents could hardly bring themselves to consent to the match. They did so at last, but only to withdraw their consent when Vincent Harley presented himself as a suitor. They forced her to marry him, and Dexter nearly broke his heart. He was much to be pitied, as well as to be blamed."

Yet again Mrs. Archer paused, for the memory of those sorrows came forcibly upon her, and it was only by an effort that she succeeded in continuing her sad history.

"After the marriage my sister saw a great deal of Captain Dexter; he was constantly with her, and followed her about like a shadow. In vain I, who loved her so dearly, remonstrated with her on this folly. She would not be warned, but rather encouraged him. You know what came of it. Fay was the child, not of Harley, but of Captain Dexter."

"I know that, Mrs. Archer," said Gilbert quietly, while she looked at him in surprise. "Miss Carr told us."

"I guessed Dexter would tell her when you mentioned his name. For my part I am glad that it is so, for it is better for her to be thus dishonoured than to have the blood of Harley in her veins. In her there is none of his hereditary insanity."

"How did his mania develop itself?"

"By the discovery that Fay was not his child. She was eight years of age before Harley's eyes were opened to Dexter's constant presence by his wife's side. Then

some one told him of the engagement, and of the love that existed between his wife and Dexter. Filled with rage, he took my sister abroad in his yacht, but was forced to land her at Trieste on account of her health. There Felix was born, the sole legitimate child. Captain Dexter foolishly followed my sister to Trieste, and urged her to fly with him. Jasper, who had learned the truth in some way, told Harley that Fay was the child of Dexter. The knowledge developed his hereditary mania, and he strangled his wife."

"Great heavens!"

"Yes, it was Jasper who concealed the crime. My sister was taken aboard the yacht as alive, then reported seriously ill, and finally the crew were told that she was dead. On the way to England the body was buried at sea, and so no one knew that she had been murdered by her wretched husband."

"How did you find out, Mrs. Archer?"

"By the merest chance. Curious to state, I had never seen Harley, as I lived in Ireland with my husband, and on my rare visits to England I usually saw my sister when Harley was absent. Shortly after her death my husband also died, and I was left widowed and childless. Harley professed a hatred for our family, so I well knew he would never permit me to hold any communication with my sister's children. Afraid lest Fay should be ill-treated by him on account of her birth, I determined to introduce myself into this house as a servant, under the name of Mrs. Archer. I did so—it matters not how—and was thus enabled to gain the love

of my sister's children. I, like you, thought that Jasper was dumb, but to my astonishment I heard him one day speaking to his master. I listened, because I heard the name of Fay mentioned, and dreaded lest danger menaced the child. Ah, it was a terrible conversation."

"What did they say?"

"Jasper spoke of the crime committed at Trieste, and boasted of his skill in hiding it. It was then I learned for the first time that my sister had been murdered. I felt sick, I nearly fainted with terror, but for the sake of Fay I controlled myself and listened, so as to know what danger threatened. I heard Jasper state how he had suggested the furnishing of the crypt, so that Harley should hide therein when his homicidal mania came on. I heard Harley state his dislike of Fay, and how he wished she was out of the way. After that I heard no more, for they went away."

She passed her handkerchief across her white lips with a look of pain.

"Think how terrible was my position, knowing about this human tiger. I watched Fay constantly, and when you came, Mr. Tresham, I was glad, for I knew you would protect Felix. Then came the departure of Harley for the Continent. I really thought that he had gone abroad, and when Felix was strangled I could not think he was the criminal. That was why I refused to speak to you. I had no definite statement to make. I puzzled over the idea as to who had killed

Felix; then I remembered Jasper's reference to the crypt, and one night paid a visit to it."

"Did you get down the trunk of the tree?"

"No; I did not know you could get down that way. How strange! I followed Jasper, and saw him descend by a trap-door. The next night I went by myself. I saw the room, and there found the white robe of the monk. Then I guessed all: that Mr. Harley had never gone to the Continent, but had waited in the crypt till the fit passed off. For the better concealment, and to take exercise, he adopted the legend of the White Prior, and encouraged the story about it. I knew then that he killed Felix."

"Why did you not tell me?"

"I had not seen you since I became aware of the truth. I feared for the safety of Fay, and so induced her to go with me to Miss Carr one night. Then Miss Carr told her the truth, told her of the danger she underwent in staying at the Priory. Terrified by the revelation she consented to remain, and is there now."

"And about to-night?"

"I was loitering in the library to hear what Harley intended to do. I saw that the fit was coming on again, for he wore the cowl of the White Prior, and Jasper was trying to induce him to go to the crypt, there to remain till the blood-lust wore itself out. I must have made some noise, for Harley saw me, and with his evil intentions fully aroused sprang at me. I fled—you know the rest."

"A terrible history!"

"So terrible that it has turned my hair grey," said Mrs. Archer. "But thank God the truth is now known, and this human tiger will be shut up by the law."

CHAPTER XX

TRESHAM'S DIARY—WEDDING BELLS

October 10th.—Many things have happened since I last opened this diary. Harley is now in an asylum, Fay has taken up her abode with Mrs. Archer at the seaside, and I am back again in London, making preparations for the new life. Barstone is with me, and is doing all that a loyal friendship can suggest to aid me for the future. As to Jasper, he refused to part from his master, and now attends on him in the asylum. Fidelity is the distinguishing mark of the man's character.

Finding that all concealment was at an end, he told me the unhappy story of his master's life. Jasper and Harley had been boys together, when the gentleman then formed a lasting affection for the servant. As a lad Harley saved Jasper from drowning, an act which bound the valet to his interests for evermore. All his life he served Harley faithfully, and will be at his side when the end comes—the end which cannot now be far off. There is something pathetic in such loyal devotion.

The greater part of Jasper's story resembled that of Mrs. Archer's; he admitted that he had warned Harley against Captain Dexter, and acknowledged that the wife had been strangled at Trieste.

"My master was mad at the time," said Jasper coolly. "He found Captain Dexter one evening at the villa urging his wife to fly, and when later on he made the discovery that Miss Fay was not his child he lost his head altogether. He turned Dexter out of the house, and though I did my best to prevent it, he quarrelled bitterly with his wife. She defied him, and told him the truth; then his mania seized him, and I entered to find my mistress dead. Knowing that my master was innocent, what could I do but save him?"

Jasper then went on to relate how the body was taken on board the yacht, how the farce was gone through of illness and death, and finally how the body was buried at sea, thus doing away with all chance of discovery. He said his master was much cast down and alarmed by this outburst of his hereditary disease, which had resulted in so terrible a crime.

"By my advice he withdrew himself from the world and came here," continued the man, "and it was just as well he did so. Every year the attacks of homicidal mania became more frequent, and unless I had watched him constantly the secret would have been discovered long ago. But no one did learn the truth, for I kept silent, as you know."

"Was that why you feigned dumbness?" I asked.

"Yes. I was terrified lest a chance word on my part should reveal the truth, therefore I hit on the plan of feigning to be dumb. My master was the only one with whom I spoke, but for eight years all at the Priory thought I was unable to speak. Miss Fay was sent away to school, and as Felix was really the son of my master, he was permitted to stay. When Miss Fay returned, Mr. Harley wished to marry her off, and was trying to do so when you appeared, Mr. Tresham. As he had slain the mother in his mania, he wished to do his best for her child."

"I understand. What about the west wing?"

"That was also my idea. The legend of the White Prior invested that part of the house with a terrible character, and was sufficient to keep away those who wished to pry into business which did not concern them." Here Jasper looked reproachfully at me. "As Mr. Harley could not stay in the house while his mania was on I looked about for some safe retreat where he could hide till he became sufficiently self-controlled to venture out. Thus it was that I furnished the crypt, the staircase in the tree I discovered, and Mr. Harley used it to slip out at night when he wanted air. To make things safer I induced him to personate the White Prior, knowing well that if he was seen people would run away. I was right, as you know."

"But how did you manage about the supposed journey to the Continent?"

"That was easy, sir. I furnished the crypt with provisions and wine. When you saw me that night in

the chapel I was taking a bundle of such things down below. Then Mr. Harley went away to the Continent, but really we both got out at a station further up the line. At night we returned in disguise and rowed up the river. It was easy to get into the crypt by the tree staircase, and there we stayed till Mr. Harley's fit passed away. For years Mr. Harley has done this, and all the time he has never been on the Continent."

"Why did you let Mr. Harley venture forth, Jasper? You saw how dangerous it was."

"I know, sir; but it was not altogether my fault. I was worn out with watching him. On that night he slipped away without my knowing, and when he returned told me that he had met with Master Felix and had killed him. That was why he told you, sir, not to let the boy walk in his sleep. He was afraid of meeting him in one of his fits. He did so, and you know the result."

"And that was why you were back so unexpectedly?"

"It was, sir. I was afraid to stay in the crypt lest search should be made; so, as Mr. Harley was then calmer again after the gratification of his homicidal mania, I induced him to leave at once and go up the line. We got into the train, and returned apparently from Homburg."

There was nothing more to be said in the matter. Jasper had told all the story, and a very terrible one it was. I could not blame the man for his fidelity, and we parted good friends: I for London, and he to the private lunatic asylum, where Mr. Harley drags out the

weary remnant of his days. He has the guilt of two crimes on his soul, and yet I cannot blame him. He was not responsible for his acts: I rather blame his parents for begetting children. Theirs was the sin, not Harley's. My greatest thankfulness is that Felix died even so terrible a death. He also would have grown up with a lust for blood. It was as well he died.

October 30th.—Fay and myself have decided to marry within six months, and meanwhile she is to stay at the seaside with Mrs. Archer. I have told her the whole story of her birth, for it was inevitable that she should know. Born in wedlock as she was, she could inherit Harley's property by law, but knowing the truth that she had no right to it, neither she nor I felt disposed to accept it. Harley cannot live long, and the estates will doubtless come to Fay; but in such an event we intend to renounce them in favour of the next-of-kin. When I think of Harley's tiger blood and homicidal mania, I am glad Fay is illegitimate, and that she runs no chance of showing the human brute. Were she truly Harley's daughter I would not marry her, dearly as I love her. The consequences would be too terrible.

We have had a piece of good fortune. Colonel Dexter has left all his property to Fay, and she is now in possession of a nice little income of five hundred a year. Thus we are above the reach of poverty. For myself, aided by Barstone, I have taken a house at Earl's Court, and am comfortably established as an army crammer. Already I have three pupils, and I hope more will come shortly. At odd times I still

work at my writing, but my main object in life is to train future heroes.

November 10th.—Barstone has just imparted the news that he is to marry Miss Carr. I am very glad to hear it, and congratulated him most heartily. He has been a good friend to me, and deserves all his good fortune. By the wish of Miss Carr, Fay is to be married on the same day. With Mrs. Archer, we will all go down to Marlow for the ceremony. I feel perfectly happy, as in a few months I shall have Fay all to myself. Mrs. Archer has agreed to live with us—to take up, as she observes, her old rôle of housekeeper. As I write, Barstone is worrying me to go with him to town, to choose an engagement-ring for Miss Carr. I must go, I suppose, so now I lay down my pen, glad that all has come to an end so well. The darkness through which we have all passed only renders the dawn more radiant. That fatal house was surely the Valley of the Shadow. It was a mercy that any of us came out alive. To think of living so many months with a human tiger and escaping death! Now that the worst is over, I can look back with horror to that terrible time. The mystery was sufficiently unpleasant, but the truth was terrible. How Mrs. Archer, who knew it all, could remain in the house I do not know. Yet if she had not done so Harley might have killed Fay. The villain!

If I write all this in a book I feel sure that it will be regarded as sensational fiction by the public. It is as well that these things are concealed, else the world

would not be fit to live in; but until medical science can deal with the question of heredity I am afraid such domestic tragedies will be common.

For myself this one experience is enough. I wish to know no more family secrets. These are more terrible than the tragedies of the greatest poets. I have but to read this diary to assure myself of the fact.

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